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EXOTIC ESCAPES

25 ONE-OF-A-KIND DIVE SPOTS

JUNE 2015
VOL. 23 NO. 5

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David Fleetham Hawaii

David grew up in Ontario, Canada just outside Toronto and in his last year of high school learned to scuba dive in a man-made lake. Soon after he purchased an Ikelite housing and a Minolta SLR camera, started working in the dive industry, and focused on his passion: underwater photography.

Since then David has become one of the most published underwater photographers in the world. He now has over 200 magazine covers under his belt, including the only underwater image ever to be used on the cover of LIFE magazine. David's philosophy is to shoot what you love, and try to capture it in a way that is unique to you.

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DANIEL NORWOOD

On the Cover: A tiny pygmy seahorse finds shelter in Lembeh. **Photo by Alex Mustard**

pg. 36

Exotic Escapes

Get our editors' picks for 25 of the world's most remarkable dive destinations – from the Azores to the Yucatan – that are sure to surprise even the most jaded divers.

WHAT'S INSIDE:

pg. 18 **Making MPAs Work** The recipe for a successful marine reserve has some key ingredients. *By Melissa Gaskill*

pg. 25 **Gear: Rashie Decisions** Add a bit of lightweight protection to your dive wardrobe. *By Roger Roy*

pg. 56 **Playa Chica** Find exquisite treasures in the gem of the Canary Islands, Lanzarote's "Small Beach." *By Arturo Telle*

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FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

EXOTIC DIVERS

We divers dream about unique diving experiences (check our masthead for an idea of what's on our wish list). Two of our editors just checked off two of theirs: deputy editor Mary Frances Emmons (French Polynesia) and managing editor Becky Strauss (Philippines). When I was still a new diver, I made a trip to Dominica, and everything about the island, from its original name – *Wai'tukubuli*, or "tall is her body" – to its diverse ecosystems (rainforests to volcanic coral reefs) captured my heart. When we planned the "Exotic Escapes" feature on page 36, we had scores of destinations on our Google doc. It took a second meeting – and a lively debate – to whittle the list to the 25 destinations that made the final cut. Water makes up about 71 percent of the real estate on the gigantic blue-marble planet we live on, so we know we missed quite a few. Why not take a moment to write to us about your dream spot?

Patricia Wuest
Editor-in-Chief

I was reminded of one of my first dive experiences after reading "How Is Anxiety Related to Dive Fitness? (Ask DAN, April). A group of us had just become certified, and we all agreed to follow a divemaster-in-training into a cave. I was at the tail end.

I got stuck – unable to swim through the narrow crevice, watching everyone leave me utterly alone. Talk about an anxious moment! But I had learned from my instructor that the worst thing you can do is panic, so I calmly waited for someone to discover I was missing. After what seemed like an eternity, the divemaster-in-training came back with a flashlight and instructed me to wiggle my way out. I did manage to get free and followed him safely out. I'm not sure if he ever got his divemaster certification, but I know that if I had let anxiety get to me, I would not be here today to tell this story.

–Sonia McLaughlin, Corpus Christi, Texas

Sonia, thanks for reminding us that our Ask DAN (page 15) column serves a valuable purpose. We hope you enjoy the Polar Pro Aqua Switchblade, made for the GoPro Hero 3+, that we're sending you as thanks for writing.

EMAIL THE EDITOR at editor@sportdiver.com.

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Manta Mania

These graceful cousins of sharks flock to the Maldives by the hundreds

Big manta rays — some with wingspans reaching 18 feet — have big appetites. Although they can be spotted year-round, the profusion of plankton in the Maldives from June to November attracts plenty of these big boys in search of food, as well as a buff and polish at a cleaning station or two. Summers offer the warmest temperatures and the best visibility — up to 86 degrees and nearly 100 feet of crystal-clear waters. — *Gabbie Mont*

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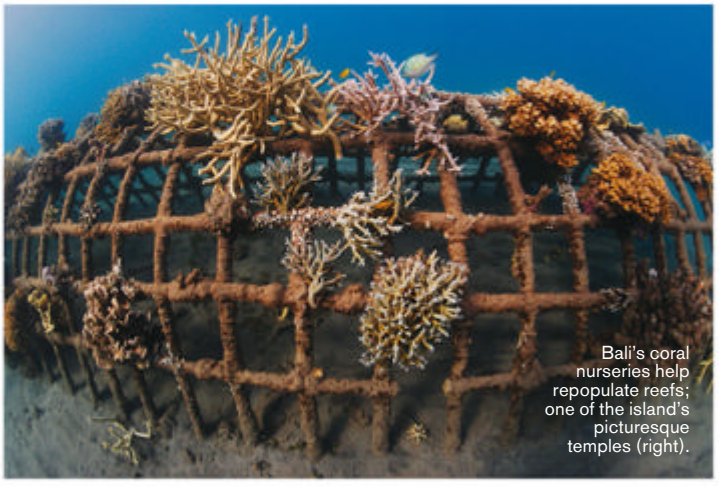

Bali's coral nurseries help repopulate reefs; one of the island's picturesque temples (right).

BALI

This tiny island stands tall among Indonesia's thousands of isles, and impresses both above and below the waves

BY BRANDON COLE

1 FROM SHORE TO SHIPWRECK

Tulamben boasts inexpensive accommodations, a kicked-back diver's lifestyle, and the famous USAT *Liberty*. Shore accessible, this former cargo ship was torpedoed during WWII. It measures about 400 feet long, and hosts a tornado of jacks, soft corals, lunker barracuda, and macro galore. **paradise-tulamben.com**

2 ISLAND OF THE GODS

Immerse yourself in Balinese spirituality while paying your respects to the predominant Hindu-Buddhist religion at serene temples such as moat-encircled Pura Taman Ayun and picturesque, lakeside Pura Ulun Danu Bratan. **bali.com**

3 MAGNIFICENT MUCK

There's plenty of magic in Bali's black-sand slopes. Sites such as Seraya and Puri Jati deliver world-class muck diving for nudibranchs, harlequin shrimp, mimic octopuses, snake eels, frogfish and more. **scubaseraya.com**

4 GREEN-SCAPED PERFECTION

An icon of any traveler's scrapbook, amazing photos of terraced rice paddies are yours for the taking at Jatiluwih, Pupuan and Tegalalang. **baligoldentour.com/jatiluwih.php**

5 NURTURING NURSERIES

At almost 1,000 feet long, the Pemuteran Village marine protected area in northwest Bali is home to more than 60 coral nursery structures, which help to build reef resilience and aid in habitat restoration efforts. **biorockbali.webs.com**

6 AN INDONESIAN KEEPSAKE

Ubud's markets, galleries and workshops showcase the mastery of local artisans. Pick up perfect souvenirs, choosing from a staggering array of paintings, wood carvings, textiles, pottery and jewelry.

7 BIG, WEIRD FISH

Bizarre and large — measuring up to 6 feet long — ocean sunfish can be encountered by advanced divers in the current-swept waters of Nusa Penida. Seasonal sightings are between July and mid-November, usually below 100 feet. **scubali.com**

8 INNER OM

Relax, realign and rejuvenate after a long day of diving with an incomparable Balinese massage, herbal soak and a complete wellness treatment. **balispaguide.com**

9 CORAL KINGDOM

The small town of Padang Bai serves as a ferry port, but the big draw here is at depth, where divers discover schools of fish, sharks, roving pelagics and remarkable invertebrate diversity along sheer walls, rocky ridges and coral gardens. **aquamarinediving.com**

10 SYMPHONY OF THE SENSES

Traditional dances, puppet shows and musical performances celebrate Bali's colorful culture. Don't miss the sunset Kecak Fire and Trance Dance show at Uluwatu Temple. Gamelan music is a great take-home souvenir. **balitobali.com/bali-dance.html**

BRANDON COLE (2)

DIVERS GUIDE TO BALI

Average water temp 70s to 80s » **What to wear** 5 mm wetsuit to 1 mm skin » **Average viz** 30 to 100 feet » **When to go** Year-round » **More info** sportdiver.com

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5 TIPS FOR DIVE TRIPS WITH NONDIVERS

If someone in your family doesn't dive (perish the thought), here's how to keep them happy while you're blowing bubbles

BY TRAVIS MARSHALL

In a perfect world, all of our friends and family would be just as obsessed with diving as we are, and all of our vacations would be spent diving on exotic liveaboards. But in reality, we have wonderful people in our lives who just don't dig diving. So when it comes to vacations, you must make some compromises to ensure that you get the bottom time you need while indulging your loved ones' vacation dreams. To help you plan a trip that makes everyone happy, here are five tips for planning a vacation fit for nondivers.

1 PICK A SPOT WITH SOMETHING FOR EVERYONE

While a coral-fringed atoll, where there's nothing to do but dive, sounds like a dream to a scuba junkie, it's a boring spot for those who prefer to spend their time on land. Pick a destination that makes everybody happy. If your nondiving travel partners love shopping, consider a cosmopolitan destination like Grand Cayman; if topside adventure is their thing, consider a mountainous island escape like Hawaii.

2 ESTABLISH DIVE TIMES

When you plan a trip with nondivers, you can't just schedule every waking moment on the boat. Talk to the dive center to decide the best times to dive — morning trips usually offer the best conditions — then work out a schedule with your nondivers ahead of time so you have plenty of time to hang out together when you're not blowing bubbles.

3 TAKE MULTISPORT DIVE TRIPS

Instead of booking your dives on small inflatable dive boats headed for remote, open-ocean dive sites, look instead for catamaran charters and island cruises that allow you to go diving while your nondiving companions get the chance to snorkel, sunbathe, sightsee, or enjoy a boat drink and the onboard entertainment.

4 PLAN A BEACH DIVING DAY

If you're vacationing in a spot with good beach diving, load the rental car with scuba tanks along with beach towels and a picnic lunch so the nondiving crew can enjoy some beach time while you explore the nearby reef. You can even get them involved by showing them how to set up the gear, asking them to be your surface support, or diving in a shallow spot where they can snorkel overhead.

5 GIVE THEM A TASTE OF SCUBA DIVING

If your nondiving travel buddies seem interested in the sport, check with your resort or dive center about PADI's Discover Scuba Diving classes. Many tropical dive operations offer the pool session for free, so your family or friends can get a commitment-free glimpse of why you love diving. With any luck, they'll catch the scuba bug and become your new dive buddies.

ILLUSTRATION: THOMAS BURNS. OPPOSITE: GRANAMOUR WEEMS COLLECTION/ALAMY

LINER NOTES

How a pop song helped spark a whale-conservation movement

BY MARINA GUERGES

In 1970, singer-songwriter Judy Collins recorded her hit album *Whales and Nightingales*. Included in the album is a song called "Farewell to Tarwathie," in which Collins debuted a haunting duet, singing alongside the sounds of whales. Accompanying the lyrics ("I bid you farewell / I'm bound off for Greenland / and ready to sail in hopes to find riches / in hunting the whale"), Collins incorporated recordings of whale songs.

The impetus for the song came after biologist Roger Payne handed Collins a reel-to-reel tape of whale songs in the summer of 1969. "It was very emotional," Collins told Michael May of Public Radio International. "Angst for being a human being on a planet where they also live, guilt for doing what we do to them."

Payne had obtained the recordings from sound engineer and military researcher Frank Watlington. "These sounds are, without exception, the most provocative, most beautiful sounds by any animal on Earth. After a long while of listening, I suddenly realized: 'My God, this thing is repeating itself,'" says Payne. He distributed the recordings to musicians, composers and singers. His purpose, as Payne told PRI's May, "was to build them into human culture."

After releasing the album, Collins donated a portion of the royalties to Payne's conservation work. Payne later hit gold when Capitol Records picked up his recordings and released *Songs of the Humpback Whale*.

Payne's album inspired a Greenpeace movement called Save the Whales. In 1972, the Marine Mammal Protection Act was established to protect all marine mammals in U.S. waters, including whales. In the 1980s, the International Whaling Commission banned deep-sea whaling; today, only a handful of countries hunt whales.

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REEF WARRIOR

Enric Sala's battle — and vision — to protect the ocean's remaining pristine places

BY BROOKE MORTON

Talk to Enric Sala, *National Geographic* explorer-in-residence, and you'll realize something: You've never seen a pristine reef. Divers use the term casually in trip reports of reefs with lots of fish, or even a shark. For Sala, 46, that's not enough. When he founded the Pristine Seas project, he had many goals in mind, including redefining pristine.

"PRISTINE REEFS ARE UNSPOILED. AS SOON AS YOU JUMP IN THE WATER, YOU'LL SEE LOTS OF SHARKS."

Q: So how do you define pristine?
A: Pristine reefs are unspoiled. As soon as you jump in the water, you'll see lots of sharks.

Q: Give us examples of such places.
A: They're uninhabited locales like the Southern Line Islands in the Pacific and Motu Motiro Hiva off Chile.

Q: How do you pinpoint them?
A: We start with places with the weakest human impacts. If it's remote, it's likely to be in good shape.

Q: Why are these places so important?
A: They are the only baselines left of healthy oceans. They tell us what we have lost — and what the oceans can be if we do the right thing.

A gray reef shark patrolling Kingman Reef.

Q: Which is?
A: To connect with the local governments to preserve these places. Through *National Geographic*, we're able to inspire leaders through stories and images, and working with our partners we provide data about why these areas are pristine. We give an economic analysis of why these areas really need to be protected. One huge problem is that people think it's OK to allow some fishing in protected areas. Protected areas that allow fishing aren't really protected, are they?

Q: Who's doing it right?
A: A great example is Cabo Pulmo, Mexico. The government set up a national park, but it's the locals who enforce the rules. When it comes to the recovery of fish, they are the most successful on the planet. The fact that it's difficult shouldn't be an excuse.

Q: Any advice for readers?
A: Yeah. Eat more vegetables.

READ MORE

Want to get involved? Sign up for marine-debris and shark-conservation ventures at **projectaware.com**.

ASK DAN

Prepare smarter

BY DIVERS ALERT NETWORK

I'm an experienced 58-year-old diver, but I've had a few health problems that have kept me out of the water for nearly 10 months. Summer is here, and mini-lobster season is just around the corner. Help! I want to be ready.

Over the 35 years that DAN has been helping divers, we have found that most accidents and fatalities could have been avoided with better preparation and training. We discuss dive safety and the importance of preparedness regularly, but unfortunately, accidents still happen. With your safety at stake, here are four key ways to prepare for an incident-free, enjoyable dive.

Have your health assessed, and get in shape.
Health problems and being out of the water for an extended period of time may have affected your fitness to dive. Ask your doctor for an objective assessment, and do not hide any symptoms, conditions, or concerns from him or her. Even if you feel you have recovered completely, your physical condition has probably degraded; and without gradual reconditioning, you might not be up to the physical challenges of lobster hunting.

Refresh your skills.
No matter your experience level, it's always a good idea to refresh your skills in a comfortable, controlled environment before returning to diving, especially at night. If you're considering new dive locations this year, take the opportunity to ease back into the sport by first diving in a familiar lake or quarry. This will allow you to gradually ramp up the difficulty of your dives, which will help to mitigate the risk of

FROM TOP: REBECCA HALE/*NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC*; ENRIC SALA/*NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC*. OPPOSITE: STEPHEN FRINK COLLECTION/ALAMY

an incident. Also keep in mind that boat traffic picks up during lobster season and in the summer, so stay alert.

Check your gear.
Your dive gear is your life-support equipment while underwater, and it should be treated and maintained with that level of importance and respect. Don't get back into the water without a thorough evaluation of your gear, specifically your O-rings, hoses, fasteners and valves. These parts can corrode or dry rot in the off-season, especially if the gear was stored while still wet. An experienced professional should check equipment, because some issues might not be obvious without some minor disassembly.

Have an emergency plan.
Unfortunately, emergencies can still happen despite the best planning and preparation. That's why it is necessary to have a well-thought-out emergency-action plan in place to handle a diving-related incident. An effective response plan addresses scene management, patient care, communications (including emergency numbers), logistics, documentation and the debriefing of emergency personnel. Make sure your plan is written down and accessible.

To learn more about how you can prepare yourself for smarter and safer diving, visit **dan.org**.

A shallow shore dive is a great way to make sure you (and your gear) check out.

It's always a good idea to refresh your skills in a comfortable, controlled environment before returning to diving.

Be A Safer Diver

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What started out as a small group of scuba diving enthusiasts with a desire to make diving safer has grown into a nationally recognized organization that has served over 1 million members. But no matter how we grow, we remain focused on our mission… your safety. DAN works endlessly to improve dive safety for divers through research, education and emergency assistance. Safe divers know that it's better to dive with DAN so visit us online and see how easy it is to become a member.

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Artist Yuriy Alekseev at work in his underwater studio.

AN UNDERWATER "DIVE VINCI"

Yuriy Alekseev creates beautiful oil paintings from the bottom of Russia's Lake Baikal

BY PATRICIA WUEST

Lake Baikal's water is always cold, but that doesn't deter a Russian painter from using the world's deepest lake as his studio and his subject matter. A rift lake in the south Russian region of Siberia, Baikal is also a UNESCO World Heritage Site that's home to more than 1,700 species of animals and plants. Inspired, Russian artist Yuriy Alekseev began hauling canvases and paints to various shallow locations.

"I was impressed by one place in the Olkhon island region, where you can see a rock going vertically down for almost 800 meters," he recalls. "When you see it, your breath is taken away. It was natural for me to want to draw what I saw."

At first, Alekseev painted scenes from memory at his studio but says he missed the energy that he got while diving. So in 2011, he fashioned a weighted easel and took his studio underwater.

There are challenges to working in water where the temps are generally between 33°F and 53°F. Oil paints make the perfect medium because they don't dissolve in water. "The biggest difficulty is that you must work wearing thick gloves, and that makes it difficult to squeeze paint out of a tube," he says. "The paint becomes stiffer in very cold water. Besides that, your perception of reality is affected — everything seems to be bigger underwater, and the way the light is filtered changes your perception of colors." And then there's the time constraint — Alekseev completes all his paintings while underwater, usually spending between 60 and 90 minutes per session.

Alekseev's first underwater painting still hangs in his studio, "an unpretentious, not-very-big painting in the corner," says underwater photographer Andrey Nekrasov, who photographed the artist at work. "It stands out next to all his paintings," says Nekrasov. "It stands out next to everything I've ever seen before."

ANDREY NEKRASOV. OPPOSITE: ALAIN DAHAN/COURTESY AQUAMERMAID

Mermaids in Motion

How one water lover is using her fins for fitness

BY TARA BRADLEY

While the existence of mermaids is largely confined to Disney movies, one self-proclaimed mermaid has created an entire school devoted to her fictional finned friends.

Professional underwater model and avid diver Marielle Chartier Hénault created AquaMermaid Academy to share her love for the water and staying in shape with other aspiring mermaids.

Located in Montreal, the classes are open to all ages and genders (hello, mermen!) and include many of the concepts found in free diving. After participants (swimmers who are at least 7 years old) are fitted for their tail, the workout begins.

"As you progress, you learn dolphin kicks, underwater spins, breath control and where best to put your hands while swimming," says Chartier Hénault.

For the guys, AquaMermaid is great for divers wanting to improve their dive skills (or to practice their underwater pickup lines).

Want a souvenir from your afternoon playing Ariel? The academy offers a professional photo session, which includes mermaid makeup, a shoot with the underwater concept of your choice and post-editing. After all that, you'll have all the proof you need that mermaids do, in fact, exist.

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MAKING MPAs WORK

It's not enough to merely designate a marine protected area — a few key features are essential to its successs

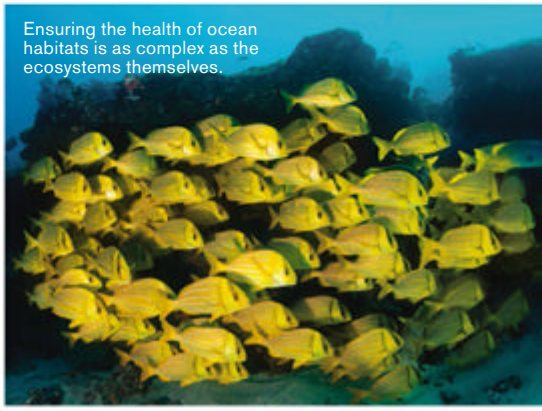
BY MELISSA GASKILL

Marine protected areas (MPAs) help reduce stress on marine ecosystems and protect spawning and nursery areas, but not only animals benefit — people benefit from the storm protection provided by habitats such as barrier islands, coral reefs, and wetlands, and gain economically from tourism and fishing.

More than 1,600 MPAs in the United States protect about 41 percent of marine waters in some capacity, 3 percent within no-take protected areas.

The Convention on Biological Diversity — a coalition of 168 countries — set a goal of protecting 10 percent of ocean waters by 2020, but scientists say that figure needs to be closer to 25 or 30 percent. Either way, protecting a certain percentage of water isn't enough — it must be the right percentage.

"Oceans are not homogeneous, and not all MPAs are created equal," says Rodolphe Devillers, Ph.D., a researcher and professor at the Memorial University of Newfoundland in Canada. "Protecting 1 percent one place does not equal protecting 1 percent somewhere else." When Devillers and other researchers examined protected areas around the globe, they found that most MPA sites were chosen to minimize costs and conflict and, as a result, make almost no real contribution to conservation or protection of species or habitats. "MPAs are management tools to protect vulnerable marine life from human activities. Typically, areas most used by humans tend to be the ones that need the most protection — but they also are the hardest to sell politically."



Ensuring the health of ocean habitats is as complex as the ecosystems themselves.

KIP EVANS/ALAMY

Overall, prohibiting extractive activities dramatically boosts MPA success. Yet only 1 percent of the world's oceans and less than 3 percent of the U.S. MPA area is currently designated no-take.

In no-take reserves worldwide, research documented an average increase of 446 percent in total marine life. Density — or number of plants and animals in a given area — increased an average of 166 percent, and the number of species present increased an average of 21 percent.

No-take requires enforcement, another key feature of successful MPAs. This presents particular challenges in isolated locations, ironically another key characteristic of successful MPAs.

Five Easy Pieces

Successful marine protected areas around the world have five features in common, according to an analysis of 87 MPAs:

1. No-take zone
2. Effective enforcement
3. Age greater than 10 years
4. Size larger than 100 square kilometers
5. Isolation

To overcome this challenge, the Pew Charitable Trusts in Washington, D.C., and Satellite Applications Catapult in the United Kingdom created a virtual-monitoring system, which so far monitors 10 locations worldwide.

Other features of successful MPAs include an age of 10 years or older and a size larger than 100 square kilometers.

"People want to believe that MPAs are like a magic wand, that with one fell swoop you can achieve bold and aggressive conservation outcomes," says Doug Rader, chief oceans scientist at the Environmental Defense Fund. "That unfortunately is not the case. But where MPAs are designed to achieve or contribute to a conservation goal, and where a fair and science-based need is recognized, I don't think there is a case that has been unsuccessful."

Behind Every Successful MPA ...

Tortugas North Ecological Reserve, Florida
Established in 2001 as a no-take reserve.
- Three commercially important fish species increased in abundance/size within three years.
- Responses were stronger in the reserve than the fished MPA for two of the three species, and stronger for all three species in fully fished areas.
- No financial loss for commercial or recreational fisheries, as well as higher coral coverage in the reserve than the MPA and unprotected sites.

Kisite Mpunguti Marine National Park, Kenya
Established in 1973; fishing prohibited in the 1990s.
- Fish biomass 11.6 times higher inside the reserve than in fully fished areas, and 2.8 times greater than in a fished MPA.
- Greater biodiversity and better protection for branching corals than a fished MPA.
- Higher fish diversity, approximately 10 more fish species per area sampled than in a fished MPA.

Cabo Pulmo National Marine Park, Baja California, Mexico
Created in the Gulf of California in 1995, no-take enforced by locals. Scientific surveys in 1999 and 2009 found no change in other Gulf of California MPAs, while at Cabo Pulmo:
- Predator biomass increased more than 1,000 percent.
- Total fish biomass increased 463 percent.
- Density of fish on the reef – 1.72 tons per acre – is some of the highest recorded anywhere in the world.

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IN HOT WATER

A pink sea slug moving north off California's coast indicates rising ocean temps

BY PATRICIA WUEST

Researchers tracking a sea slug — Hopkins' rose nudibranch — that has invaded most of the northern California coast say that it's an indication of warming seas: and a bad sign for marine life.

"We can't ignore that warming seas mean less food for seabirds, and adverse impacts for all marine ecosystems," says Dr. Terry Gosliner, California Academy of Sciences curator of invertebrate zoology and geology.

The lipstick-pink sea slugs — *Okenia rosacea* — are named after Timothy Hopkins, a railroad executive who helped establish Hopkins Marine Station. Gosliner estimates their life span is about a year. "They get their coloring from feeding on a pink bryozoan, or moss animal, that is found under rocks," says Gosliner.

Hundreds of the sea slugs have been spotted farther north than usual. And they have company. "Another nudibranch, the Spanish shawl, *Flabellina iodinea*, has been making its way from southern California into northern waters," says Gosliner.

This is not good news for an already stressed ecosystem. "The Cassin's auklet seabird has been dying in record numbers, and emaciated California sea lion pups have been coming to shore," says Gosliner. "Both are starving as a result of low nutrients in the warmer waters."

The last time these nudibranchs were found this far north was during an El Niño more than 16 years ago. While there is no El Niño now, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration says northern California ocean waters are 3°F to 5°F above the long-term average.

"We're seeing this exact cocktail of climate conditions in California right now," says Gosliner. "We are tracking the trends to find out exactly what the shift means and how it might impact marine life."

Although the Hopkins' rose nudibranch is striking, its presence on the northern California coast is not necessarily a good sign.

RON WOLF/TOM STACK AND ASSOCIATES. OPPOSITE: COURTESY STEDJI

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DRINKING RESPONSIBLY?

Conservationists protest Icelandic beer made with smoked whale testicles

BY SAMANTHA HENRY

Every year during Thorrablot — an Icelandic midwinter festival celebrating the Norse god Thor — the Steðji microbrewery releases a seasonal flavor. Its first Thorrablot brew in 2014, Hvalur 1, featured whale meal. Conservationists were less than pleased. With the recent release of Hvalur 2, the brewers drew the ire of whale lovers everywhere by featuring fin-whale testicles.

Delicacies like ram testicles, rotten shark and soured whale are a traditional part of the festivities, so Steðji's owner, Dagbjartur Ariliusson, doesn't see an issue.

"We wanted to make the perfect beer with this food," Ariliusson said. "We use the fin whale mainly because we are allowed to hunt it here, and this part of it hasn't been used before."

Even though the International Whaling Commission banned commercial whaling in 1986, Iceland refuses to recognize the law. In 2013, Iceland resumed commercial fin whaling after a two-year suspension. In 2014, Icelandic whalers killed 134 fin whales and 38 minke whales.

The International Union for Conservation of Nature's Red List classifies fin whales as endangered, but Ariliusson doesn't agree. "[Fin whales] aren't endangered here," he insists. "And the Icelandic government runs one of the most responsible fisheries in the world."

Ariliusson says Steðji sold most of its stock and claims there was no local opposition. In all, he brewed about 25,000 bottles.

But as Vanessa Williams-Grey, of the Whale and Dolphin Conservation, told *The Guardian*: "This is a calculated move, not only to dishonor a beautiful and endangered creature by using its most intimate of body parts as a marketing tool, but it also sends a clear 'two fingers' to the conservation community and those who love and respect whales."

Steðji's most recent beer is made with fin whale testicles. In 2014, Icelandic whalers killed 172 whales.

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THE WHALE SHARK

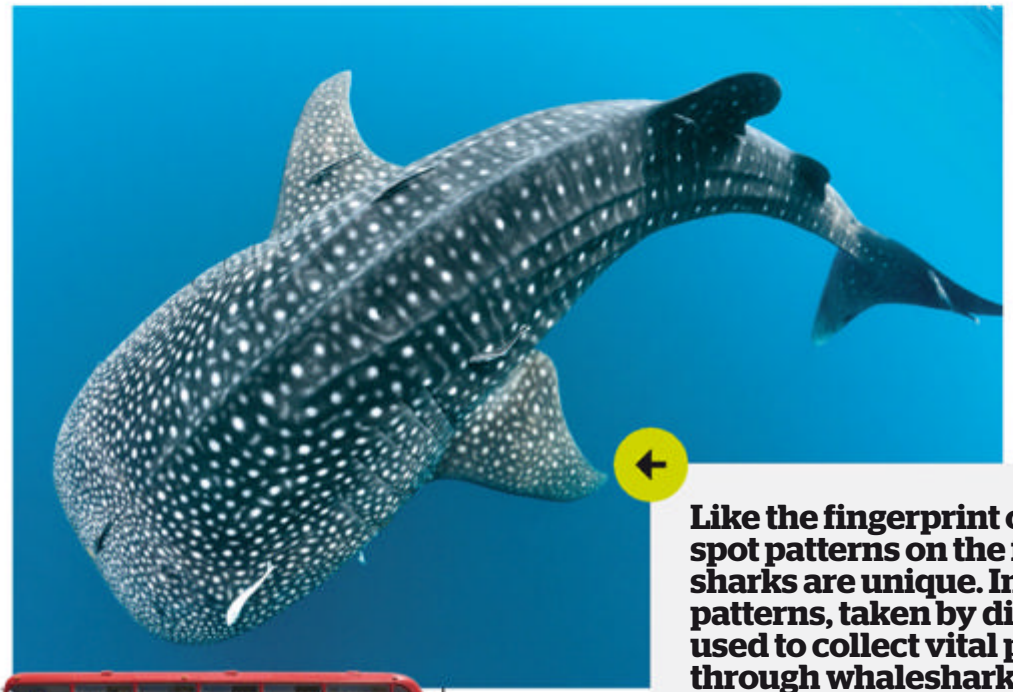
The world's enigmatic biggest fish remains largely a mystery

BY DR. RICHARD SMITH

The whale shark is most closely related to the **nurse, zebra, wobbegong and epaulette sharks**. Remarkably, it is the only one that doesn't spend its life resting on the seafloor.

Whale sharks were scientifically described in 1828, but by 1986, only 320 had ever been recorded. **Jacques Cousteau saw only two in his lifetime**.

The whale shark, *Rhincodon typus*, is listed as "vulnerable to extinction" by the World Conservation Union.



Like the fingerprint of a human, the spot patterns on the flanks of whale sharks are unique. Images of these patterns, taken by divers, are being used to collect vital population data through whaleshark.org.

It is the planet's largest living fish. The longest-ever measured was a little **longer than a London bus** and weighed almost twice as much.

In 1995 a pregnant female was landed at a Taiwanese fish market carrying **304 pups, confirming live birth in the species**. Until this point, no one knew anything about whale shark reproduction.

Only 19 whale sharks shorter than 5 feet in length have been reported, **the smallest being 15 inches long**.

The whale shark's deepest dives have been **recorded to over 5,500 feet**.

Whale sharks can be so disturbed by the touch of divers or snorkelers that **they violently shudder**.

Their 300 tiny teeth play almost no role in feeding; instead, **special porous pads filter out planktonic crustaceans**, small fishes and eggs via a process known as suction filtration.

FOLLOW RICHARD SMITH'S UNDERWATER ADVENTURES AT **OCEANREALMIMAGES.COM**

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: REINHARD DIRSCHERL/ALAMY; NATUREPIX/ALAMY; REINHARD DIRSCHERL/ALAMY; RICHARD SMITH; GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCKPHOTO. OPPOSITE: NED DELOACH

CRITTER HUNT

For the Love of Worms

Colorful and clever, worms are much more than bait

BY NED AND ANNA DELOACH

Many of the most striking examples of worms are difficult to track down. Predators relish the worms' succulent, segmented bodies, so it's essential for the animals to keep a low profile. To survive, most species spend their lives inside crevices or beneath the sand, venturing out only after dark.

On a recent visit to Dominica, our local dive guide, Tony, took us on a hunt for a scientifically undescribed species of Onuphidae worm, known only from photographs.

We headed for the shallows and searched along the surge line until we saw what we were looking for: three antennae no larger than straight pins, sticking out of the sand. Other than showing off its gaudy purple, orange and white antennae, the worm didn't cooperate until presented with the carcass of a lionfish — minus the fillet.

Tony skewered a chunk of the fish on a metal rod, and at the first whiff, the worm shot out of the sand like a cobra. Although he went for the bait, the worm extended out of the sand only a bit. Nonetheless, it was enough for us to catch a glimpse of 3 or 4 inches of its outlandish body, spangled with multihued lobes and filaments, before it disappeared.

LEGAL TRAVEL FOR U.S. CITIZENS CUBA

Learn about Cuba's unique marine environment during an Oceans for Youth Foundation People-to-People educational program. Citizens of the U.S. will fly into Havana where they will spend a full day meeting with scientists about Cuba's marine parks. After two nights in Havana, transportation is provided to the southern town of Jucaro, where the *Jardines Aggressor* liveaboard docks. Guests will depart for six days of scuba diving in the Gardens of the Queen (Jardines de la Reina) National Park, located 60 miles off the southern coast. Biologists will host discussions and presentations covering many topics including: proper mooring procedures and installations, fish tagging, commercial fishing, boat pollution and more.

The *Jardines Aggressor* liveaboard is a floating resort with deluxe accommodations, onboard chef, professional crew and state-of-the-art diving amenities.

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- *Program with scientists in Havana and Gardens of the Queen Marine Park*

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A BEGINNING STEP TO UNDERWATER EXPLORATION

Oceans For Youth Foundation is licensed by the U.S. Treasury Department for educational programs to Cuba and all activities are in full compliance with U.S. Treasury regulations. Under the U.S. economic embargo of Cuba, travel to Cuba by U.S. citizens for tourism is prohibited, however, licensed "people-to-people" educational visits are permitted.

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Dive Gear

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06/15

RASHIE DECISIONS

A rash guard is like the Swiss Army knife of diving. It protects you from the sun's rays, a brisk wind and the stings of underwater critters, all while providing thermal protection alone or under a wetsuit. Here are some rashies that do all those things — and look pretty cool at the same time.

BY ROGER ROY // PHOTOS BY CHELSEA POMALES

RASHIES

1 Lavacore Lavaskin Shirt
The soft fleece lining wicks away moisture topside and holds in body heat when submerged. The outer layer is flexible and water repellent, and the 6-inch zip makes for easy on and off, and looks cool boat-side or bar-side. Available in men's and women's sizes, and with long or short sleeves. **CONTACT:** lavacoreinternational.com **MSRP:** $62.95

2 Scubapro Fleece Rash Guard
The sleeves are extra long for hand protection with thumb loops to keep things in place. The ultrastretch fabric has a plush fleece lining, and a high-cut neck blocks the sun and keeps the collar from rubbing. Available in seven men's and seven women's sizes for a perfect fit. **CONTACT:** scubapro.com **MSRP:** $58

3 Body Glove PR1ME L/A Surf Shirt
The anatomical cut and high-stretch polyester/spandex fabric hug the body for a second-skin fit, and provide maximum UV protection. Each rash guard features a board-short connector and a low-profile collar. Available in sizes S-XL (also available in short sleeve). **CONTACT:** bodyglove.com **MSRP:** $39.99

4 Cressi Short-Sleeve Rash Guard
The superstretch nylon/elastene fabric is flat-stitched throughout for durable comfort. A high neck blocks the effects of sun and cold, and protects your neck from chafing. The shirt features bold graphics on the front and back, and is available with long or short sleeves, and in men's (blue/gray) and women's (black/pink) sizes. **CONTACT:** cressiusa.com **MSRP:** $29.95

5 Akona Long-Sleeve Rash Guard
The four-way-stretch material is fast drying, breathable, blocks 97.5 percent of the sun's rays with 50-plus SPF, and the anatomically cut shoulders provide a natural fit. The high neck has an external seam that won't rub the neck. Available in a selection of colors, in both men's and women's sizes, and with options in long or short sleeve. **CONTACT:** akona.com **MSRP:** $55

6 Bare Short-Sleeve Sun Guard
The classic design has an understated, timeless look. The high-stretch material is windproof and has a UV protection factor rating of 50. Made with flat-seam construction for long-lasting comfort, the shirt has a soft, rolled neckline to prevent chafing. Available in men's and women's sizes in a range of colors with short or long sleeves. **CONTACT:** baresports.com **MSRP:** $35.95 short-sleeve; $42.95 long-sleeve

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Before you jet off to your next exotic dive destination, brush up on your scuba skills with PADI ReActivate! The all-new ReActivate program is designed to update divers on the fundamental scuba skills needed to jump back in the water with confidence.

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Dive Life

PADI NEWS, EVENTS & PEOPLE OF THE PADI DIVING SOCIETY

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06/15

Girls Just Wanna ... Change the World

What was once a male-dominated sport has become a woman's realm

BY BRANDON BETHEA, PADI AMERICAS MARKETING CONSULTANT

AMANDA COTTON

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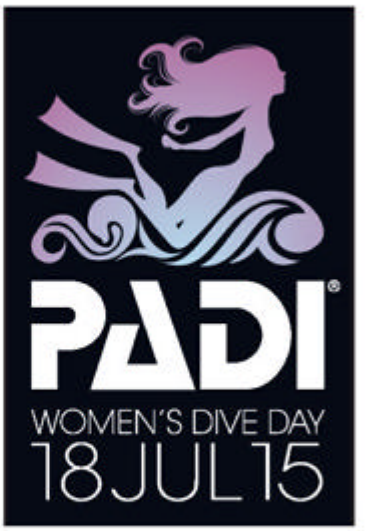

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: An image created for *The Wall Street Journal*; Women's Dive Day logo; Team Sedna on the M/V *Cape Race*. **PREVIOUS PAGE:** Cristina Zenato working with reef sharks in the Bahamas.

While diving once might have been considered a male pursuit, women are changing the face of our sport. Dr. Sylvia Earle was more than just a 2014 *Glamour* Woman of the Year; she was also deemed the first Hero for the Planet by *Time* magazine, and designated a Living Legend by the Library of Congress. The member roster of the Women Divers Hall of Fame is filled with similar women who have shaped the world of diving.

It's time to celebrate female divers' contributions to the sport, so PADI is launching Women's Dive Day on July 18 to honor them.

Women to Watch

Szilvia Gogh is a well-known underwater stunt woman and founder of Miss Scuba (miss-scuba.com), which was designed to bring together women who share an enthusiasm for diving from all over the world. She was also one of the youngest women ever accepted into the PADI Course Director Training Course and recently held a female-friendly course to develop the next generation of Dive Instructors. "What inspired them to become PADI Professionals, I believe, was that they saw me live out my dreams," says Gogh. "I get to do what I love and, to me, this means everything."

For others, like Georgienne Bradley, diving helped marry interests in biology and photography. She was instrumental in helping Cocos Island become a UNESCO World Heritage Site. One of her proudest achievements though has been her involvement in scholar expeditions for young girls. "These trips allow girls to open up, not be intimidated, and come into their own," says Bradley.

The women of SEDNA Epic Expedition (sednaepic.com) are another great example. Expedition leader Susan R. Eaton is surrounded by a team of female scientists, explorers and photographers who will embark on a 1,864-mile journey, snorkeling from Pond Inlet, Nunavut, to Inuvik, Northwest Territories in Canada. Their goal is to increase awareness of climate change and to inspire action, especially among youth and women.

A Day to Remember

If you're interested in organizing an event or participating in a local dive for Women's Dive Day, please send an email to womendive@padi.com or visit padi.com/women-dive.

FROM TOP: BRADLEY IRELAND PRODUCTIONS; BECKY KAGAN SCHOTT/COURTESY SEDNAEPIC.COM. OPPOSITE: IMAGEBROKER/ALAMY

WHERE THE ACTION IS

Let's make 2015 even more successful than last year – this World Oceans Day, please commit to ocean and shark conservation

COURTESY PROJECT AWARE

A 2014 letter-writing campaign helped protect 21 species of sharks and rays.

Many divers and water lovers keep the ocean close to their hearts all year long. World Oceans Day, recognized by the United Nations, takes place each year on June 8, and is meant to both celebrate and draw attention to the issues facing the ocean today. To effect real change, it's going to take support from individuals, communities, NGOs and businesses.

Actions both large and small can help support ocean protection, on World Oceans Day and beyond. Here are three ways to boost your conservation commitment:

Join the movement

One of the most asked questions we get: What can I do to help? Sign up to receive action alerts at projectaware.org, and follow us on Facebook and Twitter. Then be ready to respond to important calls to action or find opportunities to volunteer. In 2014, nearly 5,500 ocean advocates helped protect 21 species of sharks and rays by sending almost 29,000 letters to country leaders.

Become a debris activist

Marine debris is one of the top challenges facing our oceans today. In 2014, nearly 5,000 scuba divers in 60 countries removed and reported 90,000 pieces of trash from underwater habitats, much of it plastic (see projectaware.org/DiveAgainstDebrisMap). But we need to build an army of divers to combat ocean trash on every dive, and to influence waste managers, manufacturers, and policy leaders to change the ways we make, use, and throw away our stuff. Join the battle at projectaware.org/DiveAgainstDebris.

Give back

Nonprofit organizations like Project AWARE rely on public support to make vital work happen. Help strengthen our actions to create a healthy, sustainable ocean planet by making an individual donation online at projectaware.org/donate. Rally your dive buddies and friends to donate by organizing a fun-draiser. In 2014, supporters organized 91 Finathon events, raising nearly $51,500 to fight for, protect, and negotiate for threatened sharks and rays. Find out how at finathon.org.

Project AWARE is a powerful, global movement of committed divers and conservationists who work together to protect the ocean. We feel a responsibility to act on all levels – from local to global. Thank you for joining us this World Oceans Day to fight for the world's most threatened sharks and rays, and to tackle enormous issues like marine debris. We couldn't do it without you.

CAPTURING PEOPLE

Photographs of marine life are always good, but sometimes it's those hard-to-get "people shots" that truly tell the story

Text and Photos By Alex Mustard

Alex Mustard is a marine biologist who has been a full-time underwater photographer and author since 2004. To view more of his work, visit **amustard.com**.

A wide-angle lens is a necessity when photographing people, but these types of lenses tend to distort the scene, especially fisheye lenses. Unlike distorted fish photos, photos of misshapen divers can be distracting. Try to avoid placing people close to the corners or edges of the frame so that there are no unwanted bulges. If necessary, use processing software to correct any fisheye distortion.

Few underwater photographers start out wanting to photograph people. Our first shots are usually to record all the fish and marine life that got us diving in the first place. We might take the occasional snaps of our buddies, but new photographers are rarely motivated to take people pics.

That all changes when you start showing your images, wanting to tell stories with them, and trying to get them published. In these cases, people shots are invaluable. In short, if you want your photos to sell, the most important subject that you can point your camera toward is another diver.

Magazines love people pictures because a model adds human interest, helps tell a story and endows an image with the sense of "that could be me." Photographically, a model provides a sense of scale, which can balance a wide-angle composition, creating a point of interest in otherwise open water, and by looking at the main subject of the photo, can reinforce the viewer's interest, helping your composition work.

In theory, people should be one of the easiest underwater subjects. They are big, won't run away and will even pose on demand. However, there are a few small details to help ensure that your model shots stand out.

Model Behavior

The first challenge of people photography is finding someone willing to pose. Distant compositions can be made with passing divers, also known as models of opportunity, but most people pictures require planned posing. Many photographers dive together and take turns modeling for each other.

The best divers are usually the best models, because they look the most relaxed in the water and can most easily hold an elegant pose. Dive guides are ideal, but their time is not only yours, and they will have more-important responsibilities to tend to.

I often ask staff on their days off, who will usually be happy to have some photos to share with their family and friends. (It doesn't hurt that they are usually better proportioned than your average vacationer — or underwater photographer for that matter!)

People work best in underwater pictures when they are either near or far. Middle distance is rarely effective because the model is too far away to be lit effectively and still too large in the frame to balance the composition in the way that a distant silhouette does.

OPPOSITE PAGE
CAMERA Nikon D4, Subal housing // **LENS** Sigma 15mm fisheye // **STROBES** Inon Z240 on camera, Nikonos SB-104 off camera // **SETTINGS** *f*/13, 1/20 sec, ISO 800 // **LOCATION** Alghero, Sardinia, Italy

ABOVE LEFT
CAMERA Nikon D4, Subal housing // **LENS** Nikon 16mm fisheye // **STROBES** No strobes, Magic Filter // **SETTINGS** *f*/11, 1/80 sec, ISO 250 // **LOCATION** *Kittiwake* wreck, Grand Cayman

ABOVE RIGHT
CAMERA Nikon D4, Subal housing // **LENS** Nikon 16mm fisheye // **STROBES** Seacam 150 strobes // **SETTINGS** *f*/16, 1/320 sec, ISO 320 // **LOCATION** Misool, Raja Ampat, Indonesia

Keep Your Distance

Before diving, I discuss my plans and show the models how wide a view my fisheye lens sees, so they understand how they will appear. When working with new models, I'll start off framing them as a silhouette, which makes them less self-conscious and more relaxed. And since their eyes are not visible, they can look right at me and judge their position from the reflection in my dome port. As a silhouette, the diver's shape is critical to an engaging composition. Even small in the frame and clad in neoprene, viewers will still pick up on body language.

The best pose might take a few shots to perfect, so make sure you've got the rest of the picture right before calling in a model. It is also easier for a model to swim than to hover, so advise your model to fin across your picture, parallel to the camera. If he swims straight at you, his silhouette will be a messy blob. What also looks bad: perfect tec-diver trim, with knees bent up, frog kicks and hands thrust out in front. Neat arms and long, straight legs look much more elegant — better still if one leg is slightly bent, so the diver looks like he is swimming.

Look in the Eye

When a diver is close and lit well, his eyes will dominate the composition. Glance across the page, and you'll find that the model's eyes grab your attention, despite being small. Getting the eyes right becomes critical to the success or failure of the image.

Lighting a diver's eyes is much easier with a clear-skirted mask because clear silicone lets in the light from your strobes, while a black-skirted mask is more likely to cast shadows. Most flattering is a 1960s oval mask, which shows the entire face. But, of course, nobody uses these masks anymore, and many editors will instantly reject your photos as dated.

The best directions to give a model are to face toward the camera but not to look straight into the lens in a "Hi, Mom!" pose. If there is subject matter between you and the model, you can direct the model to look at that subject. If not, ask him to look at your hand, and hold it above and slightly to the side of the camera. But the best advice is to always be patient and encouraging. Modeling is much harder than it looks, so always be grateful to anyone willing to give his or her dive time for your photos.

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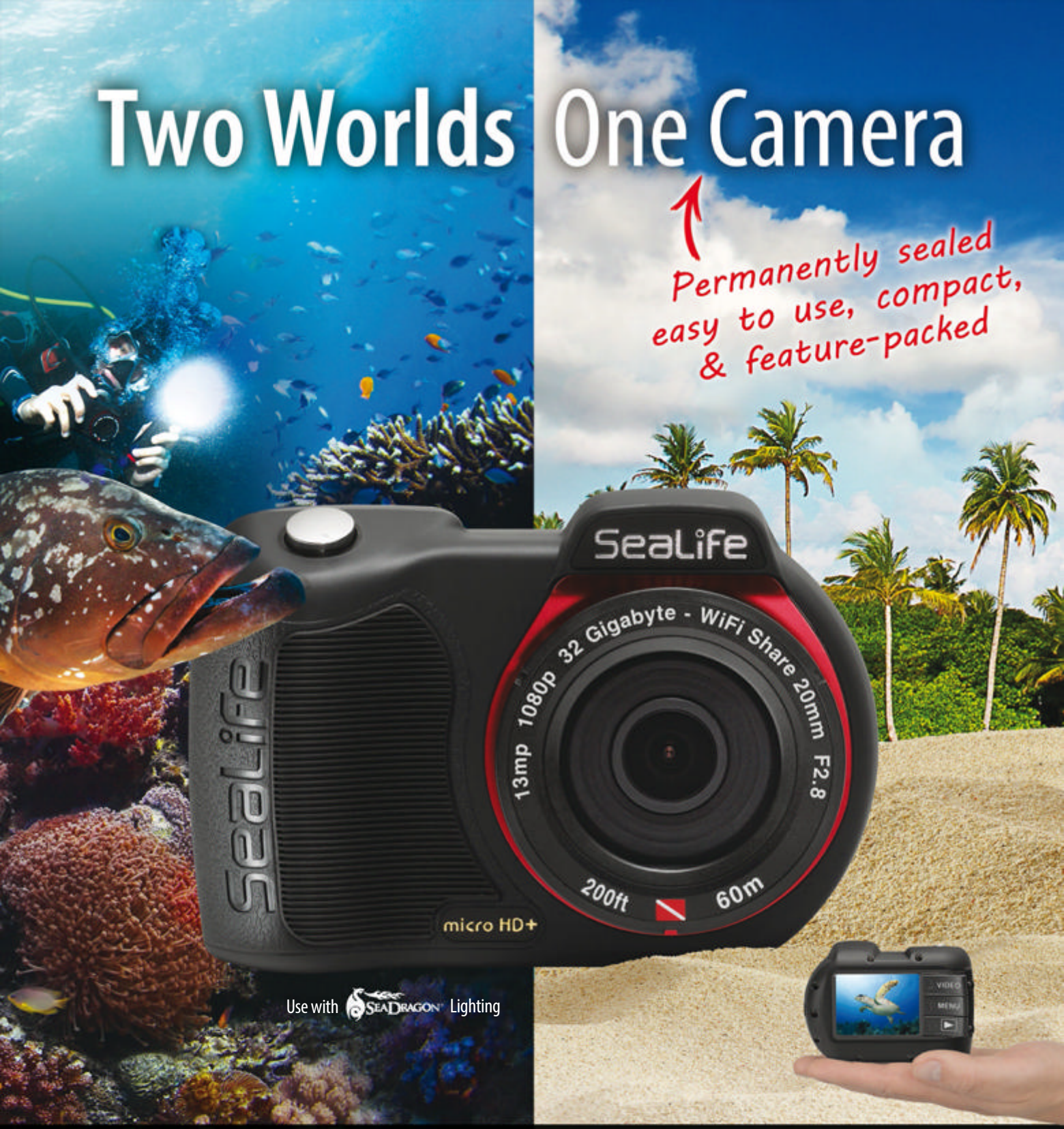

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A MIXED BUNCH

A closer look can reveal much more than a pretty picture

JOHN WALL/COURTESY SEALIFE

CAMERA SeaLife DC1400 // **STROBES** Sea Dragon Flash // **SETTINGS** f/7.9, 1/60 sec, ISO 100 // **LOCATION** Buddy Dive Resort's house reef, Bonaire // **CONDITIONS** Sunny skies and calm seas

#MYSEALIFEPIC

I was shooting schools of fish on the reef when I noticed something interesting going on: Several striped grunts had joined a school of goatfish, and they were peacefully swimming along. It was a behavior I hadn't witnessed on the reef.

— John Wall

PRO TIP **"Schools are about togetherness. Photos look best when the fish are lined up, within the frame, and making a pleasing shape." — *Alex Mustard***

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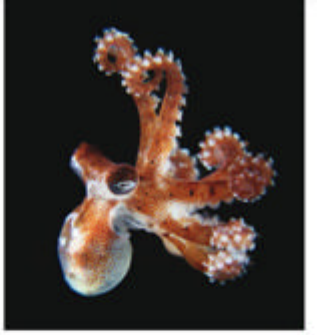

25 EXOTIC ESCAPES

Dream Getaways from Around the World

As editors, we needed multiple meetings — and a few friendly debates — as we brainstormed, lobbied and pared down our original list of 100-plus unique dive destinations to this collection of 25 of the world's out-of-the-ordinary spots. Our initial challenge: To define the attributes of an exotic dive locale — after all, what might be special to one diver might not be that remarkable to another. Our consensus: Near or far, warm water or cold, an exotic dive location is any place that's off the radar and offers something truly exceptional. (In some cases, so exceptional that local divers almost didn't want to share it with us.)

We think we've found the perfect mix of noteworthy dive getaways to keep divers in search of unique adventures happy — from classic but rarely visited Caribbean sites in St. Lucia, Tobago and Cuba, to wild open-ocean diving in the Pacific off Cocos Island and the Solomon Islands, to lesser-known places like the Azores archipelago in the Atlantic and the islands of Malta in the Mediterranean.

It's time to pack your gear for a trip that's truly special. — *Tara Bradley*

FROM TOP TO BOTTOM: ALAN LO; ETHAN DANIELS; JORDI CHIAS; AARON WONG. OPPOSITE: FELIPE BARRIO

A crown jellyfish in Hanifaru Bay, Maldives. **Opposite, from top:** An octopus floats in Balinese waters; a West Indian seastar in Belize; Chilean devil rays in the Azores; a diver passes over a sea feather in Raja Ampat.

YUCATAN CENOTES

A TYPICAL DAY

Morning pickups by Pro Dive Mexico's cave and cavern guides deliver divers through the interior jungle to a water-filled sinkhole shrouded by tropical foliage. After a safety briefing on cavern technique, descend from the swim platform into gin-clear water at the mouth of the cenote, following your guide along the white cave line that marks your route. Swim past prehistoric stalactite formations, look for fossils embedded in the rock, and fin-kick into air-filled chambers deep below the jungle floor. Trips include two cenote dives and a picnic lunch.

WHAT MAKES IT UNCOMMON

The Yucatan's cenotes offer doorways to the world's longest underground rivers. Divers have found artifacts from the Maya, who considered the cenotes portals to the underworld.

3 DON'T-MISS DIVES

1. **Taj Mahal** Discover an air pocket in a bat cave, where holes in the ceiling shoot spectacular beams of sunlight through the crystal-clear waters.
2. **Kukulkan** Explore the hypnotic rippling effects of a halocline — a layer of heavier salt water sitting beneath the fresh water — at around 30 feet.
3. **The Pit** The deepest of the cenotes at nearly 400 feet, divers descend into a suspended cloud of hydrogen sulfide at about 100 feet, where ancient tree branches grasp in the dark.

TOPSIDE TIP

Take a day trip south along the coast to explore the seaside ruins of Tulum, or spot rare endemic birds like the clavinet emerald hummingbird in the Sian Ka'an Biosphere Reserve. — ***Travis Marshall***

CONTACT: ***prodivemex.com***

01

02

Azores

A TYPICAL DAY

The landing point for divers at this remote spot is Pico Island's Portuguese-flavored Madalena. In the heart of the Atlantic Ocean, buffeted by the Gulf Stream, the Azores is ideal for blue-water diving; day trips to the Princess Alice Bank offer schools of mobula rays, while mako shark trips allow encounters with the fastest sharks in the sea.

WHAT MAKES IT UNCOMMON

Set along the Mid-Atlantic Ridge, 850 miles from a continent, the Azores offers open-ocean diving with sharks, rays and whales.

3 DON'T-MISS DIVES

1. **Princess Alice Bank** Summer months bring schools of mobula rays and a plethora of pelagic fish.
2. **Ilhéus da Madalena** A swim-through leads to a stingray mating area with throngs of rays, sea bream and moray eels.
3. **Blue and Mako Shark Diving** From July to October shark wranglers get divers close to these distinctive apex predators.

TOPSIDE TIP

Pico Island's vineyards have earned UNESCO World Heritage Site status; make time for a tasting around Lajido, Cabrito and Madalena. — ***TM***

CONTACT: ***diveazores.net***

FROM LEFT: BRANDON COLE; FRANCO BANFI. OPPOSITE: MAURICIO HANDLER

03 BRITISH COLUMBIA

A TYPICAL DAY

You'll start with sipping piping-hot coffee as beams of rising sun pierce the evergreen branches at God's Pocket Resort. Enjoy dives to remote walls and passes where plumose anemones grow 3 feet long, rockfish dance among strands of bullwhip kelp, and dolphins and orcas stalk fish in the open water. Spend surface intervals hiking or kayaking topside, and an after-dark shore dive at the dock offers the chance to spot Puget Sound king crab and giant Pacific octopuses hunting among the pilings.

WHAT MAKES IT UNCOMMON

Fast tidal currents push nutrient-rich water through the deep channels between the islands, creating technicolor walls of cold-water corals where Muppet-faced wolf eels peer from rocky dens.

3 DON'T-MISS DIVES

1. **Browning Wall** The legendary cold-water dive can be dived only at slack tide, when you can see massive basket stars and candy-striped shrimp inside anemones.
2. **Castle Gap** A rare spot where it's safe to dive on the tidal current, this narrow channel offers a fast drift along a sheer wall with massive anemones and cup corals.
3. **Hunt Rock** A shock of kelp tops this undersea pinnacle, along with colorful anemones and decorator crabs hiding in the safety provided by encrusting corals.

TOPSIDE TIP

Keep your eyes peeled for orcas, minke whales, and harbor seals frolicking at the surface; during summer spot humpback whales feeding just off the beaches. — *TM*

CONTACT: ***oceanprodivers.com***

YAP

A TYPICAL DAY
Divers flock here for the year-round manta sightings but also to explore Yap's unspoiled reefs. From sunny coral gardens to walls of soft corals, all are populated by heaps of marine life big and small, including ocean sunfish. Currents feed the island's creatures, and offer drift dives that rival any on the planet.

WHAT MAKES IT UNCOMMON
Isolated deep in Micronesia, the tiny island benefits from being off the beaten path and sees very little traffic on the reefs, unless you count the parade of giant Pacific manta rays for which the region is famous.

3 DON'T-MISS DIVES
1. **Miil Channel** Winter means mating season for the pelagics, when they dance in trains numbering in double digits.
2. **Vertigo** Chum-sicle feeding attracts gray reef, silky, and white- and blacktip reef sharks. And the nearby wall – the West side's steepest – isn't bad either.
3. **Yap Caverns** These caverns have skylights and swim-throughs with soft corals and whitetips snoozing in the shadows.

TOPSIDE TIP
Locals share their Micronesian customs, art and architecture at the Bechiyal Cultural Center. – ***Eric Michael***
CONTACT: ***mantaray.com***

04

05

COCOS ISLAND

A TYPICAL DAY

Good things come to those who wait. But for those who undertake the open-ocean ride on one of the Undersea Hunter vessels out to Cocos Island, off Costa Rica's west coast, *great* things are coming, like massive stingrays, one of the the world's best night dives and, of course, the reason you're out here: sharks. Specifically hammerheads, which home in on the island like it's an oasis in the desert. The waters are so thick with sharks that if you strike out with the hammerheads, you'll still be spoiled by Galapagos sharks, and swarms of whitetips and tiger sharks.

WHAT MAKES IT UNCOMMON

This is no ordinary liveaboard trip: You're 36 hours from the nearest land, surrounded by sharks. It might make ordinary people quake in their boots, but it's a diver's dream.

3 DON'T-MISS DIVES

1. **Manuelita Coral Gardens** Unless you spook easily, don't miss this night dive where you're followed by packs of whitetip reef sharks that hunt by your light.
2. **Bajo Alcyone** It might take a Herculean effort to get down onto this submerged pinnacle (currents can be *that* strong), but the reward is hundreds of hammerheads.
3. **Dirty Rock** Steep walls that drop down from this tiny rock are home to massive schools of trevally and snapper, surrounded by Galapagos sharks and hammerheads.

TOPSIDE TIP

There aren't many opportunities for testing your sea legs on land, but try a hike near the ranger station to see picturesque waterfalls and native birds. — ***David Espinosa***

CONTACT: underseahunter.com

FAR LEFT TO RIGHT: ANDY SALLMON; JEFF YONOVER; SOLOMON BAKSH

06

Tobago

A TYPICAL DAY

Whether it's the colorful, current-swept reefs in the south, or the healthy, current-swept reefs in the north, this small island's diving is the Caribbean's best-kept secret. Of course, not every dive in Tobago is current-swept — the south's *Maverick* wreck lies in a quiet bay, and several of Speyside's best dives are protected from currents. If you head for Tobago, be prepared for some drift diving, where you can sit back and enjoy the ride.

WHAT MAKES IT UNCOMMON

You may never see another dive boat, giving you some of the Caribbean's healthiest reefs all to yourself.

3 DON'T-MISS DIVES

1. ***Maverick*** This purpose-sunk wreck is festooned with white soft corals and packed with glassfish.
2. **Japanese Gardens** Gigantic barrel sponges make this look like a rock garden, even when you're rushing past in a current.
3. **London Bridge** Not always accessible, this site is famous for a 100-foot-long arch that divers have to pass through single-file.

TOPSIDE TIP

Between dives, gorge on local specialties like "doubles" or *roti* (if they're not sold out). — ***DE***

CONTACT: tobagodiveexperience.com

07 TONGA

A TYPICAL DAY

Keeping a keen eye on the horizon for the telltale sight of black-and-white flukes in hopes of being the first to scream "Whale!" will be your main mission aboard *Nai'a*. The 120-foot steel-hulled sailing liveaboard accommodates 18 guests in nine air-conditioned staterooms. But you won't spend much time below deck, as the main attractions — snorkeling and free diving with humpback whales — will keep you wet and smiling. The giant mammals travel annually from their Antarctic feeding grounds to mate and give birth in the warm, clear waters off the tiny Polynesian island. Memorable encounters range from watching a mother teach her calf to breech the surface to a competition pod of males chasing a fertile female. And it's all accompanied by a haunting symphony of whale song.

WHAT MAKES IT UNCOMMON

Tonga is one of the few places where it is legal to swim with humpback whales.

3 DON'T-MISS DIVES

1. **Whale Snorkeling** Bring a wide-angle lens to capture spectacular breaching and tail-lobbing humpbacks.
2. **Mariner's Cave** This cavern dive offers the brave a view of a creepy fog created in the air chamber by surge. It's also a great place to spot multihued nudibranchs.
3. ***Clan McWilliam*** This 423-foot wreck on the edge of Neiafu Harbor rests upright in 120 feet, and offers decades of coral growth.

TOPSIDE TIP

Grab polarized lenses so you can gaze at the whales before you join them. — ***EM***

CONTACT: ***tonganexpeditions.com***

BRANDON COLE

08 CUBA

A TYPICAL DAY

The Gardens of the Queen is the forbidden fruit of the Caribbean. The protected area features pristine reefs and healthy mangroves where life of myriad variety thrives. Exploring is comfortable and convenient aboard Avalon Cuban Diving Services fleet of six liveaboards. Yachts range from the quaint 110-foot *Tortuga* double-decker houseboat to the luxurious 107-foot *Avalon Fleet I*, which can accommodate 16 divers in eight air-conditioned staterooms. Sharks are more plentiful than just about anywhere else in the region, and an encounter with saltwater crocodiles adds to the adventure.

WHAT MAKES IT UNCOMMON

Described by marine biologists as a time capsule of the Caribbean, the Gardens of the Queen has been a protected, no-take marine conservation area since the 1960s. (Fidel Castro loved to dive there.)

3 DON'T-MISS DIVES:

1. **Farallon** This towering coral pinnacle (claimed as one of the best sites in the MPA) is pierced by swim-throughs, and populated by plentiful silky and gray reef sharks.
2. **Vicente** With a wall plunging hundreds of feet into the blue, this drop-off is home to a rare abundance of black coral.
3. **Pipin** Alongside caverns offering mysterious places to hunt for macro critters, this site also serves up tarpon and eagle rays.

TOPSIDE TIP

Cuban culture, cuisine and music thrive in tourist-friendly areas of Havana — not to mention the iconic '50s-era automobiles. — *EM* CONTACT: ***cubandivingcenters.com/en***

SCOTT JOHNSON. OPPOSITE, FROM LEFT: DEBBIE ARRIAGA; ANDY MURCH/OCEANWIDEIMAGES.COM

RAJA AMPAT

A TYPICAL DAY

Today, everyone's phone is a GPS, and with Google, you are never lost. While you might think exploration is dead, you too can be an explorer like Magellan in eastern Indonesia's Raja Ampat. Though you'll enjoy world-famous dives in the north – including sites around Bird's Head Peninsula and Raja Ampat – it's the largely uncharted south where you'll truly feel like an explorer. Even if it has already been mapped by Google. (It hasn't.)

WHAT MAKES IT UNCOMMON

Big-fish sites, macro dives, massive schools of fish, and some of the healthiest (and most colorful) coral reefs in the world – Raja Ampat has it all.

3 DON'T-MISS DIVES

1. **Figure 8 Rock** Head to the southwest corner of this site for a plateau (at 65 feet) chock-a-block with soft corals and sea fans.
2. **Andiamo** One of the fishiest sites, you'll want more than one go on this pinnacle thronged by sharks, fusiliers and batfish.
3. **Arborek Jetty** Bring both a wide-angle (for soft corals and sea fans on the pylons) and macro setup (for Pontoh's pygmy seahorses) on this shallow dive.

TOPSIDE TIP

After your dive at Arborek, dry off for a tour at the village of the same name. Bring some small gifts for the kids, and you'll see 1,000-watt smiles. – ***DE***

CONTACT: ***thearenui.com***

09

10 WESTERN AUSTRALIA

A TYPICAL DAY

We like to believe the reason more than 85 percent of Australians live near the coast is because the diving is really that good. Though Queensland – with the Great Barrier Reef – gets most of the accolades, Western Australia might offer the continent's most diverse diving: whale sharks on Ningaloo Reef, New Zealand fur seals and Australian sea lions on Seal Island (Albany), iconic gray nurse sharks at Rottnest Island (Perth), and purpose-sunk wrecks, jetties, and more shore dives than you can shake a fin at. Which makes us wonder – what is the other 15 percent waiting for?

WHAT MAKES IT UNCOMMON

Starting at Ningaloo and ending at Albany, Western Australia's dive sites aren't just diverse, they're also geographically far apart.

3 DON'T-MISS DIVES

1. **Busselton Jetty** There's plenty to explore under this timber-piled jetty, and with an average depth of 25 feet, there's plenty of time to do it.
2. **HMAS *Perth*** Purpose-sunk in 2001 off Albany, the former guided-missile destroyer is now home to wobbegongs, western blue devils and samson fish.
3. **Rottnest Island** Perth divers have it good, with more than 200 sites on this island just 12 miles offshore. Go for the caves, and stay for Australian divers' pride and joy: gray nurse sharks.

TOPSIDE TIP

After diving the purpose-sunk HMAS *Swan*, near Dunsborough, take a 40-minute drive south to winery-rich Margaret River, Australia's answer to California's Napa Valley. – ***DE***

CONTACT: ***perthscuba.com***

11 BELIZE

A TYPICAL DAY

The wildlife doesn't sleep in on Turneffe Atoll, one of Belize's three vibrant atolls. Most of the sites (close to 70 of them) are only a five-minute boat ride away, making surface intervals on your private porch a cinch. Boats leave two to three times a day, so expect to log at least 15 dives a week.

WHAT MAKES IT UNCOMMON

Diving sites like the Elbow, a carnival for the sea's showiest creatures, often means a full day in a boat, but stay at Turneffe, and you can drop by like an old neighbor.

3 DON'T-MISS DIVES

1. **Half Moon Caye Wall** If Dr. Seuss designed a 70-foot-deep wall dive, this would be it: purple sponges, zany tunnels, and fish so big and colorful, they could make off with Christmas.
2. **Aquarium** Coral ridges help channel currents to feed crinoids, lace corals, and all manner of creatures from parrotfish to rays.
3. **Tackle Box Canyon** The western hemisphere's biggest barrier reef pushes right up against Ambergris Caye, and Tackle Box highlights the best of it with swim-throughs, rays and nurse sharks.

TOPSIDE TIP

Stick to the sea, and you'll see only half of what makes Belize so special. Head inland to hike to waterfalls and visit the big cats at the Jaguar Preserve. – ***TM***

CONTACT: ***turnefferesort.com***

ALEX MUSTARD

12 ICELAND

A TYPICAL DAY

The volcanic island is popular for music festivals, hot springs the size of Olympic swimming pools, and epic cold water that has been filtered for 300 years from the glacier to the lake. You'll find unparalleled visibility, big animals like orcas, and mesmerizing lakes with vents that bubble — but only if there's been an earthquake. Don't worry, last year saw more than 35,000 earthquakes — small ones, but big enough to fuel the vents. For dry time, head outside the capital city of Reykjavik for ATV riding, dog sledding and snowmobiling.

WHAT MAKES IT UNCOMMON

Dive Iceland and you can brag that you've finned in between two continental plates, and in the clearest water on Earth, glacial-fed and lava-filtered for at least 30 years.

3 DON'T-MISS DIVES

1. **Silfra** Aka the "Big Crack," this is the nature-made fissure between the North American and European continental plates.
2. **Gardur Pier** Divers have encountered killer whales and spotted dolphins, as well as snails, wolf fish and monkfish.
3. **Strytan** A geothermal chimney within recreational dive depths, this site is found on the northern part of the island. It might seem like a haul to reach until you consider that in the Pacific, the majority of oceanic chimneys are nearly 2 miles deep.

TOPSIDE TIP

Make reservations at the Reykjavik bar called Tapas, one of the city's most popular hangouts, known for small plates of local fare like smoked puffin and local fish.

— Brooke Morton CONTACT: *scuba.is*

BALI

A TYPICAL DAY

On the early-morning drive up Bali's east coast to dive Tulamben's *Liberty* wreck, you might stop to take pictures of a colorful religious procession, or of a young girl offering your driver a water blessing at a roadside temple. When you finally arrive at the world-famous site, you'll stop to get out, dive and take more pictures — of the fishy wreck, some of the best macro in Indonesia, and colorful reefs too magnificent to capture with your widest wide-angle lens. Best of all, the next day you'll get back in the car and start all over again.

WHAT MAKES IT UNCOMMON

Bali offers a unique blend of culture, natural scenery, warm, beautiful people, and the quintessential introduction to Indo-Pacific diving.

3 DON'T-MISS DIVES

1. ***Liberty* Wreck** No trip to Bali is complete without a dive on this World War II transport ship that is almost 400 feet long and a fabulous fish magnet.
2. **Seraya Secrets** This black-sand shore dive is home to cryptic frogfish and seahorses, patterned nudibranchs, mimic octopuses, and oddities like harlequin shrimp.
3. **Manta Point** Once you've had your fill of macro and wrecks, head to the southwest tip of Nusa Penida, a 40-minute boat ride from Bali, for mantas year-round.

TOPSIDE TIP

Balinese landscapes are a photographer's dream, with views of rice paddies, rolling hills, and smiling children in school uniforms. — ***DE***

CONTACT: ***aquamarinediving.com***

13

14

Tofo, Mozambique

A TYPICAL DAY

Everything's wilder in Africa, from the animals (lions and elephants) to the landmarks (Kilimanjaro and Stanley Falls) — and so is the diving. Leave your macro lens at home for a trip to Tofo, where massive manta rays patrol the Indian Ocean's vibrant reefs, humpback whales migrate along the coast from May through October, and whale sharks — up to 30 at a time — are seen year-round. There's no taming Africa.

WHAT MAKES IT UNCOMMON

Tofo is the home of giants: sharks, mantas and whales. If you could ever tire of that, colorful reefs also shelter tinier treasures like frogfish and nudibranchs.

3 DON'T-MISS DIVES

1. **Manta Reef** Grouper, trevally, morays and dozens of manta rays (with 25-foot wingspans) come here to be groomed at the three cleaning stations.
2. **Amazon** One of Tofo's most challenging sites, this moderately deep reef is home to zebra sharks and whitetip reef sharks, and a resident loggerhead.
3. **Praia da Rocha** Fusiliers and yellowtail barracuda give color to this shallow dive, which is also good for encountering whale sharks.

TOPSIDE TIP

Pair your dive trip with an overland safari to a national park like the Maputo Elephant Reserve. — ***DE*** ***CONTACT:*** ***diversityscuba.com***

FROM TOP TO BOTTOM: MOODBOARD/CORBIS; ALEX TYRELL. OPPOSITE: ETHAN DANIELS

15 SOLOMON ISLANDS

A TYPICAL DAY

These isles offer unfettered exotic beauty, no crowds, charming islanders, WWII history and extraordinary diving. With minimal tourism, locals embrace visitors with enormous smiles, songs, fresh produce and perhaps the finest carvings in the Pacific. Most divers join a liveaboard to cruise the outer-island groups, though there are a few land-based operations. Five dives a day is the norm, while fresh food is plentiful. With so much to fill every day, it is hard to stay awake after sunset, but the nightly sojourn to the deck to witness an unequaled tapestry of stars is not to be missed.

WHAT MAKES IT UNCOMMON

These fabled tropical islands have largely remained out of public attention since the epic battle of Guadalcanal during WWII.

3 DON'T-MISS DIVES

1. **Leru Cut, Russell Islands** A natural crack in a vertical wall of limestone leaves a deep, narrow cavern with dancing sun rays — a favorite for photographers.
2. **Mary's Place, Mary Island** Schools of barracuda and jacks, along with mantas and sharks, join in with the schools of thousands of brilliant tropicals.
3. **Devil's Highway, Florida Islands** Divers "fly" over the lip of a submerged cliff and then duck out of the current while a squadron of large manta rays lines up just overhead. In ideal conditions, 10 to 15 mantas hover almost motionless a few feet away.

TOPSIDE TIP

Telina Village has some of the finest wood carvers in the world. *— Tanya G. Burnett*

CONTACT: ***solomonsdiving.com***

16 NEW ZEALAND

A TYPICAL DAY

Motor out of Tutukaka Marina and spend a day exploring below, and above, the water at the Poor Knights Islands Marine Reserve, where an unusual blend of marine life thrives against a backdrop of sheer volcanic seamounts. Make a first dive under towering lava-rock arch formations thronged by schooling maomao and endemic species like moki and porae. And spend a second, shallower dive, perusing the rock walls for ornately colored nudibranchs. A long lunch and surface interval allow for bird-watching and kayaking among the islands.

WHAT MAKES IT UNCOMMON

The Poor Knights Islands straddles the line between the tropical and temperate South Pacific, and boasts a unique mix of marine life from both regions.

3 DON'T-MISS DIVES

1. **Northern Arch** This massive undersea arch is hewn from the lava rock. During summer, the narrow canyons here are filled with mobs of short-tailed stingrays.
2. **Rikoriko Cave** The darkness inside the world's largest sea cave offers the chance to see rare marine creatures like nocturnal nudibranchs and carpet sharks.
3. **Landing Bay Pinnacle** A pinnacle starting at 15 feet and dropping to 150 feet, divers can find firebrick starfish clinging to the rocks, and fish like mackerel and pink maomao cruising the perimeter.

TOPSIDE TIP

Take surf lessons on clean breaks in Sandy Bay or hang ten in a totally different way — by sandboarding down the Te Paki Sand Dunes. — *TM* CONTACT: ***diving.co.nz***

BRANDON COLE, OPPOSITE, FROM LEFT: ALLISON VITSKY SALLMON; JEFF YONOVER

FIJI

A TYPICAL DAY

From the white-sand islands of the Mamanucas to the deep-purple walls off Vanua Levu, Fiji delivers all the South Pacific touches. Spend your days finning with turtles and your evenings relaxing at a local kava ceremony. The diving is exceptional as much for the wildlife as the topography, with parades of moorish idols and angelfish swirling along massive walls, historical wrecks and towering columns that make any tank seem too small.

WHAT MAKES IT UNCOMMON

Fiji packs an enormous amount of diversity into the sea. Think 1,000 species of fish and the "soft-coral capital" of the world.

3 DON'T-MISS DIVES

1. **Great White Wall** A sloping coral tunnel spits you out close to 100 feet down on a wall covered in soft white corals.
2. **Grand Central Station** At this site in North Save-a-Tack Passage within Namena Marine Reserve, you'll understand why Jacques Cousteau came to Fiji in the first place.
3. **Black Magic Mountain** Large bushes of black corals provide an artsy contrast to the unicorn fish and coral trout in the currents.

TOPSIDE TIP

Make time for a short hike into Taveuni's fragrant Bouma National Heritage Park. — ***Tim Neville*** **CONTACT:** ***zegrahm.com***

17

18 KOSRAE

A TYPICAL DAY

Kosrae is the Micronesian diving ideal, boasting warm, clear water, plentiful pelagic marine life and a rainbow of soft corals that will captivate divers of all breeds, especially photographers. Spend topside time exploring the maze of mangroves via kayak, swinging the afternoon away in a hammock, or dining on local delicacies.

WHAT MAKES IT UNCOMMON

Dive destinations don't get much more remote — or exotic — than Kosrae. Hidden just north of the equator, the lush island boasts fringing reef systems that are healthy and virtually undisturbed by man.

3 DON'T-MISS DIVES

1. **Shark Island** The name says it all. Drifting along a sloping wall, divers can watch schools of barracuda and several species of sharks cruise in the current.
2. **Walung Drop-Off** Swept by strong, life-giving currents, this near-vertical wall is a hot spot for thick schools of horse-eyed jacks, barracuda, Napoleon wrasse and other big fish.
3. **Blue Hole** This sacred tidal pool (it's said the remains of ancient Kosrae kings were scattered here) is sheltered from the open ocean and offers snorkelers lots to see, including juvenile reef fish, stingrays and blue-water mangroves.

TOPSIDE TIP

A site of historical and cultural importance, the Lelu Ruins were once the cultural center of Kosrae, where the island's chiefs ruled hundreds of years ago. Today, the stacked-stone remains of more than a hundred walled compounds and structures are a cool diversion. — ***EM*** **CONTACT:** ***kosraevillage.com***

19 BRITISH VIRGIN ISLANDS

A TYPICAL DAY

Local dive centers offer pickup service to the many sailors who cruise the BVI, and they bring everything you need. Simply jump aboard the dive boat for a two-tank trip to sites like the wreck of the *Rhone*, and they'll return you at day's end.

WHAT MAKES IT UNCOMMON

A variety of islands big and small — strung closely together along the Sir Francis Drake Channel — makes the BVI one of the best spots for a diving adventure.

3 DON'T-MISS DIVES

1. **HMS *Rhone*** On your first dive, explore the deep bow section; spend your second, shallow dive on the wreckage of the stern, smashed against the rocks of Salt Island.
2. **Alice in Wonderland** This lush coral garden off Ginger Island offers mushroom corals and a colorful kaleidoscope of reef fish.
3. **Blonde Rock** Yellow fire coral tops this pinnacle, which is lined with ledges housing nurse sharks and lobsters.

TOPSIDE TIP

Sail to Jost van Dyke and get marooned, drinking painkillers at the Soggy Dollar Bar. — ***TM*** **CONTACT:** ***peterisland.com***

PAPUA NEW GUINEA

A TYPICAL DAY
Wake to the aroma of fresh Papua New Guinea highland coffee and a feast of exotic tropical fruit. Many dives here are close, while others make a worthwhile run to the outer coral-reef bommies. Of special note: The Tufi Wharf night dives are not to be missed — the guides are experts at spotting camouflaged denizens.

WHAT MAKES IT UNCOMMON
Tufi Fjord, part of Cape Nelson, offers unique topography for Papua, and is home to local villages. Women sport fantastically intricate face tattoos and are quick to interact. If the edge of the Earth calls to you, you'll find it here in the southwestern Pacific.

3 DON'T-MISS DIVES
1. **Honeymoon Reef** The saddle between ridges hosts a huge stand of pristine lettuce coral — a perfect backdrop for patrolling reef sharks and fusiliers.
2. **Mullaway Reef** You can usually count on six to 10 gray reef sharks, plenty of turtles feeding in the shallows, pulsing schools of iridescent chromis, and countless other brilliant reef fish.
3. **Tufi Wharf** A mucker's paradise in less than 30 feet, with WWII relics as well as bizarre findings and inhabitants.

TOPSIDE TIP
Go for a hike with a local guide. The true reward is the view from McClaren Fjord. *— TB* **CONTACT:** *chertan.com*

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21

Malaysian Borneo

A TYPICAL DAY
Much ink has been spilled over Sipadan, but don't overlook the other small islands off Malaysian Borneo's east coast. Mabul and Kapalai are the yangs to Sipadan's yin, with weird macro critters and a unique house reef (on Kapalai). Guides are skilled in finding the ocean's oddballs like ghost pipefish and camouflaged frogfish.

WHAT MAKES IT UNCOMMON
There's nothing to do on Mabul and Kapalai but dive, dive, dive. And best of all, the diving's easy.

3 DON'T-MISS DIVES
1. **Seaventures Rig, Mabul** This former oil rig holds rarities like nudibranchs and pygmy seahorses.
2. **Froggy Lair, Mabul** Hidden among the rubble: frogfish, nudibranchs and the flamboyant cuttlefish.
3. **The Jetty (Kapalai)** Five wrecks are clustered together at the end of this short jetty. Peek inside for crabs and morays.

TOPSIDE TIP
If you fly through Kota Kinabalu, the Orangutan Care Project is a good opportunity to visit these awesome terrestrial animals. *— DE* **CONTACT:** *borneodivers.info*

FROM LEFT: MICHELE WESTMORLAND; CHARO GERTRUDIX. OPPOSITE: CHARO GERTRUDIX

22 MALDIVES

A TYPICAL DAY

You'd need a lifetime to explore the dive sites of Maldives' nearly 1,200 islands. Luckily, since the diving is awesome everywhere, the toughest decision you'll ever have to make will be choosing between cruising the 26 atolls, diving from a liveaboard like the Four Seasons *Explorer* versus ensconcing on a single-resort paradise island, and getting to know each nearby site more intimately. Whatever you decide, you're virtually guaranteed encounters with eagle rays, reef sharks and schooling fish, and each atoll has at least one manta aggregation site.

WHAT MAKES IT UNCOMMON

Warm water and dives with nonstop parades of mantas and sharks; Maldives has some macro, but this is a big-fish paradise.

3 DON'T-MISS DIVES

1. **Manta Point (every atoll)** Though the name might differ from atoll to atoll, virtually every resort has a nearby manta aggregation site for some manta face time.
2. **Kandooma Thila, South Male Atoll** A teardrop-shaped *thila* that starts at 50 feet, the northern and western edges can draw a massive school of jacks, and packs of whitetip and gray reef sharks (and eagle rays).
3. **Fish Head, Ari Atoll** Located in the middle of nowhere, this small pinnacle has marine-protected-area status, and is a favorite for its gray reef sharks and snapper.

TOPSIDE TIP

No trip to the Maldives is complete without a village tour. Doesn't matter the island; the people everywhere are warm and friendly to visitors. — ***DE*** CONTACT: ***fourseasons.com***

MALTA

A TYPICAL DAY

This Mediterranean island is all about history. Wrecks, both historical and artificial, are among the most common draws for divers – and most can be done from shore. You can make your own dive schedule or get a personal tour with Dive Malta in the town of St. Julian's or Dive Deep Blue on the northeast coast. Dive trips typically depart at 8:30 a.m. for two dives from shore or boat. If you opt for the boat excursion, you'll also gain access to the sites on the neighboring isle of Gozo, just 1 mile away.

WHAT MAKES IT UNCOMMON

Malta lies smack in the middle of the Mediterranean, and all of its storied history. History buffs can discover wrecks from both world wars, as well as caves and caverns.

3 DON'T-MISS DIVES

1. ***Um El Faroud*** The 377-foot oil tanker was purpose-sunk in 1995 off Malta's southwest coast in 114 feet of water. It's upright but split in two halves.
2. ***Imperial Eagle*** Sister ship to Jacques-Yves Cousteau's original *Calypso*, this former ferry now lies at about 130 feet, and is adjacent to a reef and a statue of the Ascension of Christ.
3. **Anchor Bay** The cavern dive is extremely safe with one entry and one exit; inside, if you devote time, you'll spy shrimp, morays, octopuses and lobsters.

TOPSIDE TIP

Spend at least half a day inside the walled city of Mdina, taking a break with coffee and cake at the Fontanella Tea Garden.—***BM*** **CONTACT:** ***scubadivingmalta.com***

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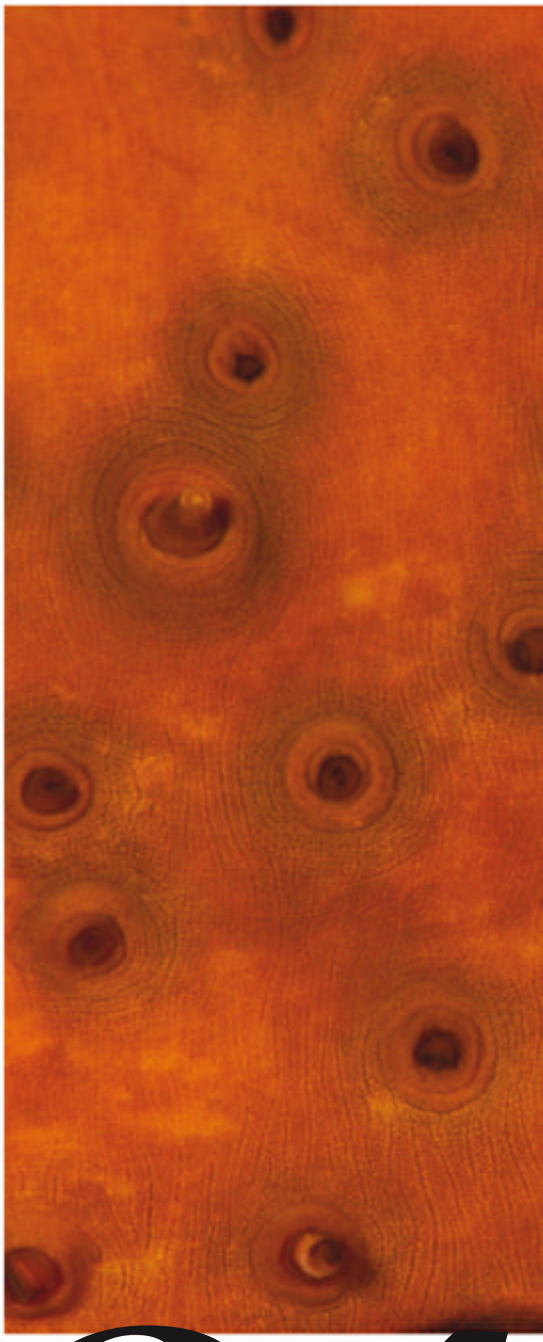

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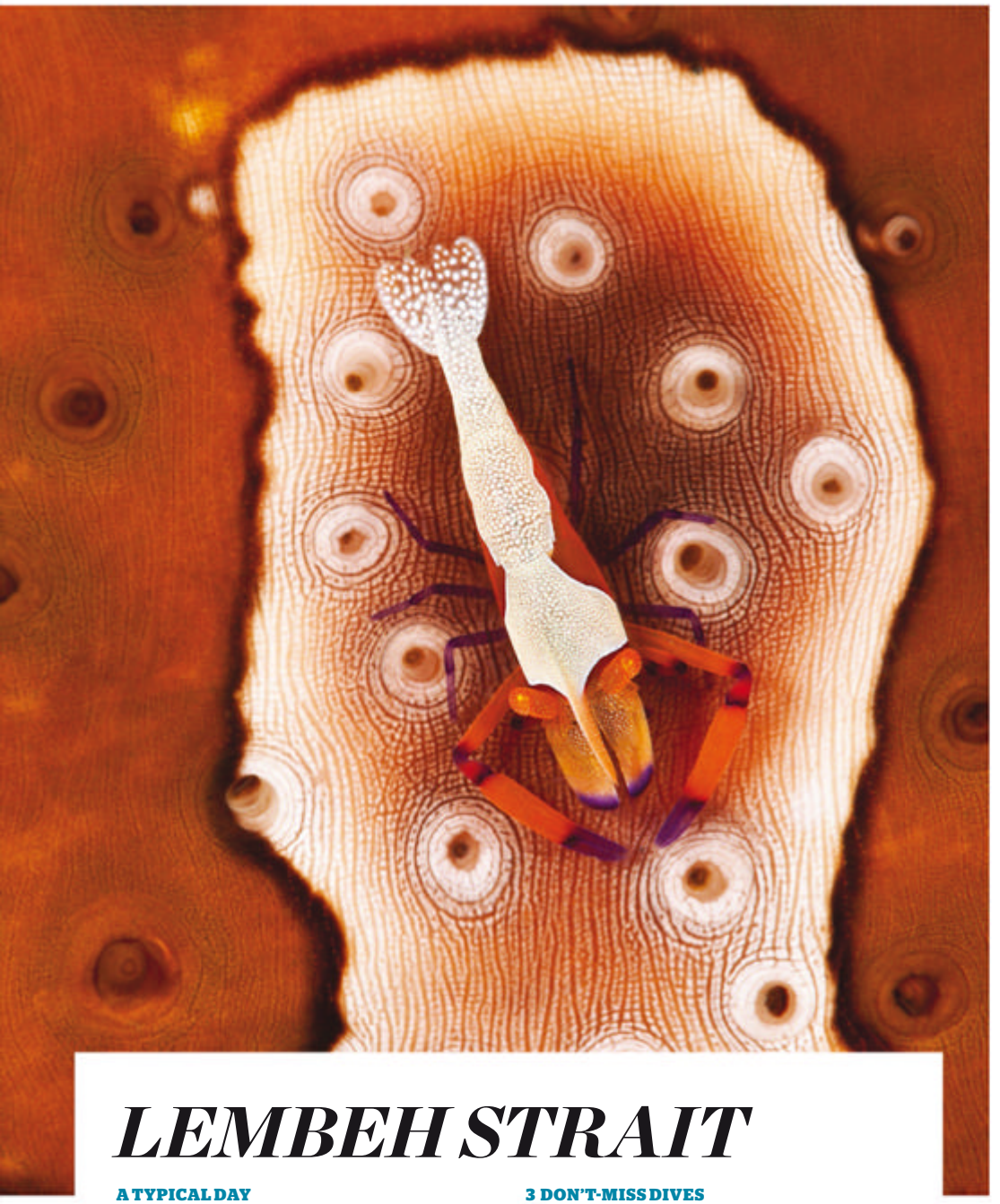

JÜRGEN FREUND. OPPOSITE: TOBIAS FRIEDRICH

LEMBEH STRAIT

A TYPICAL DAY

Since the mid '90s, Indonesia's Lembeh Strait has grown exponentially in popularity with divers in search of the ocean's oddballs. Bring a list of what you want to see, and your guides will help cross off every one: an octopus with a mohawk? Check. Hirsute frogfish? Check. Plus more eels, nudibranchs, rhinopias, cuttlefish, boxer crabs and shrimp than you can count. With due respect to Asia Pacific's amazing critter destinations, Lembeh Strait is the Mecca of Muck. And after one week there, you'll have seen everything there is to see (not really).

WHAT MAKES IT UNCOMMON

You'll spend the majority of your bottom time swimming back and forth across seemingly desolate black sand. Swim slowly, look closely, and you'll find the tiny treasures.

3 DON'T-MISS DIVES

1. **TK1** Logs and discarded fishing nets from the nearby village are strewn across the black-sand bottom hiding mimic octopuses, pegasus sea moths and leaf scorpionfish.
2. **Nudi Falls** Comb the soft-coral beds for ribbon eels and gobies, before ascending shallower to find pygmy seahorses and a logbookful of nudibranchs.
3. **Hairball** Named for the "hairy" frogfish and pipefish found here, Hairball is also a hot spot for decorator crabs, coconut octopuses, flamboyant cuttlefish and stargazers.

TOPSIDE TIP

Set aside a day to visit the Tangkoko Nature Reserve, a short drive from Lembeh. There you'll (hopefully) see hornbills, cuscus and endemic tarsiers. — ***DE*** CONTACT: ***reefrainforest.com***

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St. Lucia

A TYPICAL DAY

This Lesser Antilles Island of green jungles and hillside hotels sets the stage for epic romance. Underwater, encounter volcanic craters and a critter-rich community. For convenience, base yourself on the island's northern end, which holds the majority of infrastructure, including newer accommodations, high-end shopping, late-night restaurants and bars, plus golden sand beaches.

WHAT MAKES IT UNCOMMON

You need only peer up at the vertical spires known as the Pitons to understand why diving St. Lucia is a cornucopia of topography.

3 DON'T-MISS DIVES

1. **Superman's Flight** Located at the base of Petit Piton, dive mineral-rich waters with fluorescent pink sponges. Fun fact: The cliff face was the shot location for *Superman II*.
2. ***Lesleen M*** This inter-island freighter became an artificial reef near Marigot Bay in 1986. It's now home to snapper, sergeant majors and parrotfish.
3. **Anse Cochon South Beach** Thanks to the variety of topography — patch reefs, boulders, walls made of pinnacles and boulders— it's not uncommon for divers to spot squid, frogfish and seahorses.

TOPSIDE TIP

To witness thousands of the island's indigenous green parrots coming in to roost, hike into the rainforest around 4 p.m. — or at 6 a.m., when they take off for the day. Find them along any trail near Marigot Bay or Vanard. — ***BM*** CONTACT: ***divesaintlucia.com***

spanish beauty

Off Morocco lies Lanzarote, home to Playa Chica, the most beguiling site in the Canary Islands

I've been asked many times about my favorite dive spot in the Canary Islands. Choosing one of the seven major islands as the best overall is impossible, but naming the single-best site is easy: Lanzarote's Playa Chica, which means "small beach" in Spanish. The most popular dive spot in the Canaries — summer can see an average of 300 divers entering the water — Playa Chica offers extremely easy access as well as truly wonderful underwater scenery. This stretch of idyllic white sand, flanked by rocky tongues on both sides, offers a shore entry via a staircase, and as soon as your head dips below the water's surface, the first surprise is usually the great visibility, normally more than 60 feet, and sometimes reaching a stunning 120 feet or even more. Beginning from the shore, in only 10 or 15 feet of water, you're already surrounded by plenty of small life — groups of Atlantic and bluefin damselfish, parrotfish, Turkish wrasse, saddled breams, pompanos, cow breams, white breams, two-banded breams, zebra breams ... the list goes on. A profusion of small fish, used to divers and snorkelers, accompanies you as you make your way to deeper water, where even more life awaits: Barracuda, stingrays, Atlantic grouper, and more pop in and out of the caves and overhangs, and combine to make Playa Chica truly the gem of the Canaries.

TEXT AND PHOTOS BY ARTURO TELLE

Clockwise from left: Playa Chica has a wealth of treasures. Just below the staircase lives the friendly, and curious, red-lipped blenny; interesting critters can be discovered nearby in the sand flats, such as the beautiful banded tube-dwelling anemone (top center) and the club-tipped anemone showing off various shades of yellow, orange, white, red and violet (far right). Dusky grouper are very territorial of their area, so it's typical to see one big adult male and 10 or more females and juveniles. It is estimated that this grouper weighs around 85 or 90 pounds. **Previous page:** It is common for orange coral, one of the most colorful species in the Canaries, to be found deeper than 150 feet. These huge branches were photographed at the much-shallower depth of just 65 feet.

Divers Day Off: Even though Lanzarote offers two great tourist areas with shopping centers, restaurants and night life, the island attracts mainly nature lovers who want to do more than shop, eat and sunbathe. Its naked volcanic landscape gives a unique color and shape to the island, allowing visitors to see and almost feel the lava flow hundreds of years after the last eruption. Check out Parque Nacional de Timanfaya, which is the location of the volcano that last erupted in 1824. Or visit Los Jameos del Agua, a cave inside a volcanic tunnel created by the eruption of La Corona volcano. Within the cave is a natural lake, home to the endemic blind albino cave crabs (*Munidopsis polymorpha*) that dot the lake's rocky floor.

Divers Guide to Playa Chica:

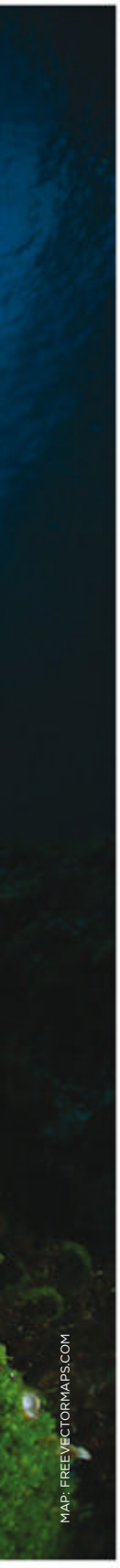
» **Average water temps:** August to October 73 to 77ºF at the surface; February and March are the coldest, with surface water temps of around 64ºF at the surface
» **Average visibility:** 60 to 120-plus feet
» **What to wear:** 5 mm to 7 mm wetsuit in the warmer months; semidry wetsuit in winter
» **When to go:** Year-round

Don't-Miss Dives

El Agujero Azul (The Blue Hole)
Look to the right as you enter the water, and you'll find a large sand flat sloping down gently to a drop-off at around 60 feet, parallel to the shoreline. There are plenty of overhangs, small caves, and a 30-foot-long swim-through that gives the dive site its name. The walls and ceilings are covered with colorful sponges, and don't forget to look into the blue to spot passing barracuda, a car-size stingray or, with a bit of luck, a huge amberjack.

La Cueva de las Gambas (The Shrimps' Cave)
Entering from the stairs and diving straight ahead offshore, along the hill that serves as a continuation of the rock line, you'll reach a drop-off at around 75 feet. Continuing down, keeping the wall to your left, you'll find a large cave with the entrance at 124 feet, going up to 115 feet in the interior. Here lives a huge grouper and thousands – maybe millions – of shrimp. It's simply spectacular if you enter without a light and then switch on your torch to see the bottom and sides completely covered with shrimp, scattering away from the light into the deeper part of the cave.

The Cathedral
Just in front of the beach, the scenery includes a huge – but not deep – cave, with the bottom at 90 feet. The interior is covered with colorful sponges, and among them you can spot many grouper, some of them really huge – over 3 feet long and up to 80 pounds. Beautiful black coral decorates one of the walls outside the cave, and the occasional angel shark on the sand flat on top of the cave makes the dive complete.



MAP: FREEVECTORMAPS.COM

Clockwise from far left: Finding the annulated sea hare often requires a closer look between the rocks and under overhangs where it likes to hide during the day; the comb sea star hunts during the night for food on the sand bottom; stargazers bury themselves in the sand, with their mouths and eyes just visible as they watch for prey; located in very shallow waters of the sheltered bay outside the main harbor of Lanzarote, the *Telamon* wreck lies half-sunken. The former cargo ship is riddled with openings that let in light, making it popular among photographers.

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BY BROOKE MORTON

Even Cozumel's reefs are easy to get to.

SHAWN RENER

WHERE TO DIVE NEXT ...

Explore the Dive World

Plan your next getaway, and get awesome dive deals and travel tips on 10 destinations featured in Caradonna Dive Adventure's Must-Dive Destination Guide at **sportdiver.com/caradonna-dive-adventures**.

1 GRAND BAHAMA

The big advantage to the Bahamas is that you don't lose a day — or any time at all — if you travel back to Florida by sea. The high-speed ferry *Balearia* departs Port Everglades in Fort Lauderdale at 8 a.m. every day but Wednesday, and starts the three-hour return from Freeport at 7 p.m. Althea Johnson, of UNEXSO dive resort, says that most divers start with the Saturday-morning dolphin dive, and in the afternoon do the Caribbean reef shark feed. "If you're looking for big animals, it's definitely the way to go," she says. On Sunday, if the boat captain elects to do so, divers can see the 230-foot *Theo's Wreck*, at 103 feet deep, or *Sea Star II*, a 172-foot freighter at 93 feet deep — all before saying goodbye.

unexso.com

2 COZUMEL, MEXICO

Life on Cozumel is defined by diving, and for those touching down for just a weekend, this means the extra attention to details makes shorter trips seamless. The island sees direct flights from a lot of airports you'd expect — Atlanta, Dallas, Houston and Newark — plus a few you might not, namely Denver, Detroit, Milwaukee and Minneapolis. Dive with Martin, a locally based outfitter, wants visitors to bypass bag-weight restrictions, luggage fees and waiting at suitcase carousels, so they include free gear use on all dive trips. Their boats also get a jump-start by departing at 7:30 a.m. to be the first on the reefs at Cozumel's classic sites such as Palancar Reef, home to huge coral pillars thousands of years old.

divewithmartin.com

3 ARUBA

It's one of the Caribbean's most popular destinations — and higher traffic means visitors benefit from more air-travel choices. Multiple carriers fly direct from major U.S. cities, including Atlanta, Boston, Chicago, Philadelphia and Washington, D.C. Most weekenders flock to the beaches, but those with C-cards kick back by kicking among wrecks: the 240-foot *Jane Sea* cement freighter, a pair of intentionally sunk airplanes, and the most famous, the 420-foot SS *Antilla*. For divers seeking turtles and other marine life, J.P. Fang, owner of JADS Dive Center, points out that the island has lots of choices when it comes to reefs; his favorite is Baby Beach. "It's a drift dive close to the southern tip of the island where lots of nutrients flow past, so it's common to see eagle rays and stingrays."

jadsaruba.com

HOWARD MOSS/ALAMY. OPPOSITE: MASA USHIODA/COOLWATERPHOTO.COM

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4 LA PAZ, MEXICO

There are direct flights from Los Angeles, San Francisco and San Diego to San Jose del Cabo, only 22 miles from Cabo San Lucas. From there, it's two hours via shuttle to La Paz, but it takes only one call or email to arrange the entire journey. "We get a reservation, and we take care of the hotel, the diving and how you'll reach us," says Ricardo Fifield, manager of La Paz's Cortez Club. "The main attraction year-round is sea lions," he adds. It's a great spot for interactions thanks to water temps in the high 80s and, from July to November, visibility averaging 100 feet. From October to February, it's whale-shark season. Fifield says that encounters are almost guaranteed. And the sharks keep good company. He says, "We often see mobula rays feeding on the same plankton as the whale sharks, and dolphins in the same area — it's amazing."

cortezclub.com

5 VIEQUES, PUERTO RICO

"People don't want big changes in their currency, time or diet if they're traveling for just a few days," says Arnaud Erhart, owner of Isla Nena Scuba on Vieques, 30 minutes via puddle jumper from Puerto Rico's east coast. For Americans, especially East Coast residents, this island is convenient for all these reasons — plus the fact that the San Juan airport is a major Caribbean hub. From there, three carriers offer daily flights to Vieques. Erhart's favorite site is Mosquito Pier, a man-made breakwater home to green and hawksbill turtles, southern stingrays and goliath grouper. "The best part," he says, "is that you can leave New York around 8 a.m., and by 1:30 in the afternoon, you're here, in the water." For weekend travelers, that's one big change that's welcomed.

islanenascuba.com

GREG LECOEUR. OPPOSITE: DAVID FLEETHAM

6 ROATAN, HONDURAS

It's easy to think that this exotic-sounding locale is too far for a weekend jaunt, but flights to Roatan from Miami are less than two hours — you can make direct hops from Atlanta and Miami. The trick is that if traveling for just a few days, divers will likely have to connect through San Pedro Sula, a mainland city, for one leg of the trip. But the payoffs are many: At Tobri Divers Resort, motor times to dive sites are roughly seven minutes or less. Plus the island stretches only 33 miles long, so it's all easy to access. From Tobri, divers looking for night life can taxi to West Bay, 25 minutes away. If guests stay until Monday, they're on island for Sunday night's festivities, crab races and fire-dancing performances.

tobri-divers.com

7 OAHU, HAWAII

The five-hour flight from California makes Oahu a destination better suited for a three-day weekend, but it is convenient nonetheless — especially if you're trying to squeeze in dives during the family holiday.

Most dive trips start early, around 8 a.m., so divers can rejoin the nondiving members of their party for other activities by mid-morning. Some of the island's most popular underwater attractions are the turtle-cleaning stations at sites like Nautilus Reef, where divers are almost guaranteed to see 700- to 800-pound turtles, plus 250 species of reef fish. Topside, Oahu is also popular for its museums and World War II history — it's far more than just wrecks and reefs. But it's those dive sites that are worth the ocean crossing.

diveoahu.com

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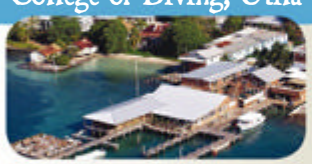

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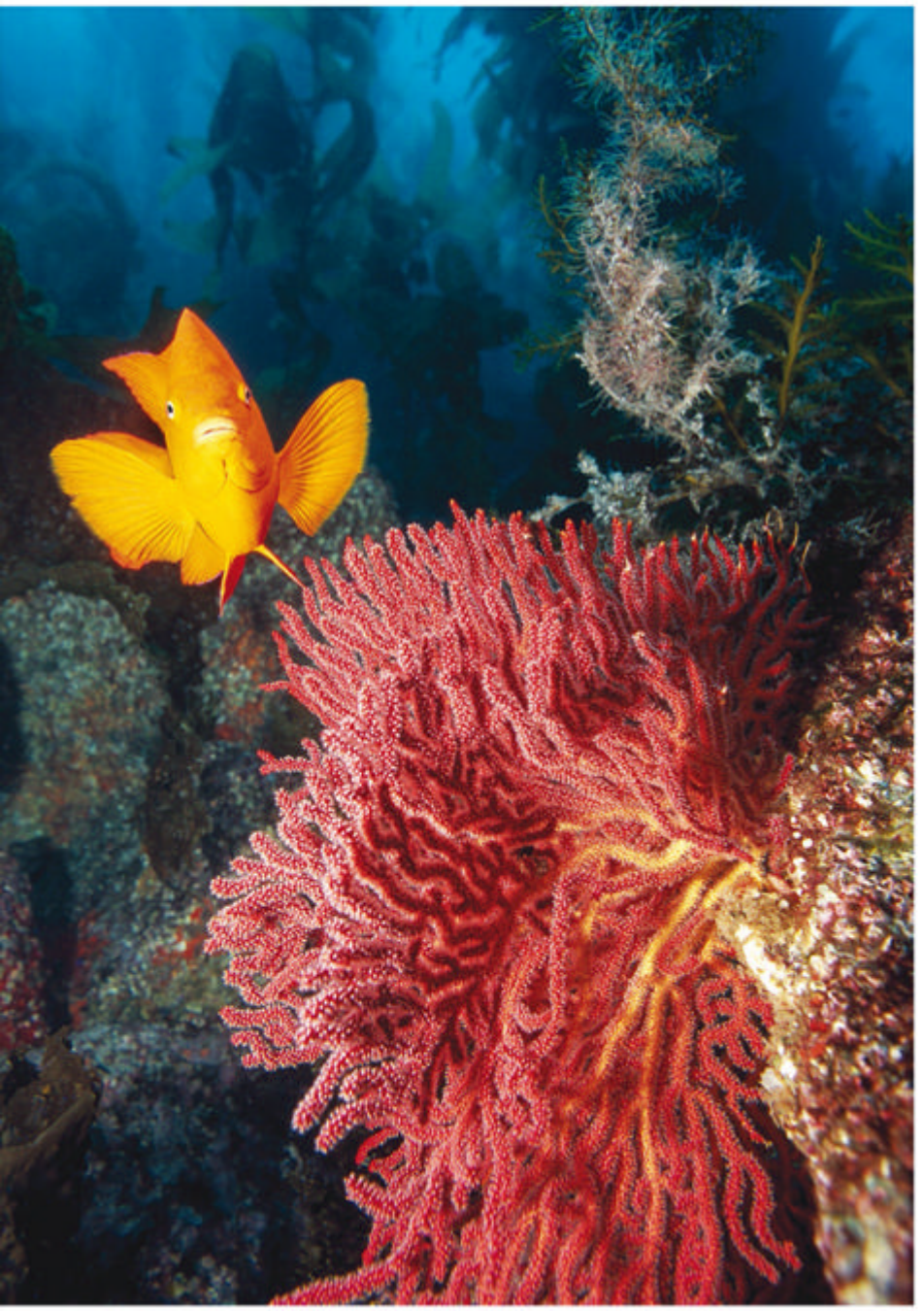
8 CATALINA ISLAND, CALIFORNIA

"It's 26 miles to Catalina from the 405," says Tina Kennedy, owner of Catalina Scuba Luv, of the distance from Los Angeles' often-packed freeway to her pocket of paradise. It's an easy choice for day-trippers, but about half the folks ferrying over stay for the weekend. That's enough time to squeeze in at least 10 dives — from what is possibly the country's most famous shore dive, Casino Point, to more-remote spots accessible only by boat. That's plenty of opportunity to pack a logbook with kelp dives and encounters with sea bass, garibaldi, sea lions, and more.
scubaluv.com



9 FORT LAUDERDALE, FLORIDA

The Fort Lauderdale airport is 10 minutes by taxi from the Atlantic shore and dive resorts like Sea Experience. "You don't need a rental car," says Bill Cole, owner and boat captain for the resort. As a dive destination, Fort Lauderdale is known for reefs but more so for wrecks. One of the area's most popular sites is *Hog Heaven*, a 180-foot barge sitting next to a second barge, concrete culverts, an airplane wing, and a radio tower covered in soft coral. Cole likes the site because divers can spread out, and because it provides prolific habitat for animals like eagle rays, tarpon and turtles. Says Cole, "You don't know what you're going to see there, but there's always something big."
seaxp.com

10 GRAND CAYMAN

Nonstop flights connect a number of U.S. cities to Grand Cayman. Once you've landed, it's easy to feel worlds away. "You can be at a totally isolated area — a small beach all to yourself — within minutes," says Sergio Coni, of Don Foster's Dive Cayman. But of course, most divers want to see the reefs. "We get a lot of people who come for three to four days," says Coni. "They arrive and dive Friday night, squeeze in as much as possible on Saturday and Sunday, and then parasail and kayak on Monday."
donfosters.com

FROM LEFT: MATTHEW MEIER; ELLEN CUYLAERTS

Listings

*Dive operations listed in bold are recognized as PADI Five Star Dive Centers or Resort Facilities

EXOTIC ESCAPES

AZORES
Dive Azores
diveazores.net

AUSTRALIA
Perth Scuba*
perthscuba.com

BALI
AquaMarine Diving*
aquamarinediving.com

BELIZE
Turneffe Island Resort
turnefferesort.com

BORNEO
Borneo Divers and Sea Sports*
borneodivers.info

BRITISH COLUMBIA
Ocean Pro Divers*
oceanprodivers.com

BRITISH VIRGIN ISLANDS
Peter Island Resort & Spa
peterisland.com

COCOS ISLAND
Undersea Hunter
underseahunter.com

CUBA
Avalon Cuban Diving Centers
cubandivingcenters.com/en

FIJI
Zegrahm Expeditions
zegrahm.com

ICELAND
Scuba Iceland*
scuba.is

KOSRAE, MICRONESIA
Kosrae Village*
kosraevillage.com

LEMBEH, INDONESIA
Reef & Rainforest Dive & Adventure Travel
reefrainforest.com

MALDIVES
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fourseasons.com

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Aquatica*
scubadivingmalta.com

MEXICO
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RAJA AMPAT, INDONESIA
Arenui the Boutique Liveaboard
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SOLOMON ISLANDS
Solomon Islands Dive Expeditions
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ST. LUCIA
Dive Saint Lucia*
divesaintlucia.com

TOBAGO
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NARCOSIS CONFUSION

The signs of narcosis are subtle, but the results can be serious

BY KARL SHREEVES

INCIDENT REPORT

DIVERS: Alicia and Marcus (both AOW with 100-plus dives)
SITE: Wreck off Florida's Gulf Coast **CONDITIONS:** Partly sunny, slight chop, 20-foot visibility, 78ºF surface temperature, 62ºF bottom temperature, mild current

Well out at sea, Alicia and Marcus descended on a fairly intact, 180-foot wreck in 140 feet of water. They planned to inspect the propellers, which at last report, were half-buried and tucked well back under the stern's superstructure.

Hooked perpendicular to the wreck's starboard side, the pair found the anchor amidships, deck level, at 90 feet. Following the hull, they reached sand at a gloomy 135 feet. Marcus checked a sketched map on his slate, turning it around several times, looking right and left repeatedly. Finally, he signaled, "Go right." Alicia hesitated, but Marcus insisted. Following the hull, Marcus led, ascending to 125 feet as they went. After several minutes, they reached the end of the ship. Instead of propellers, they found mangled steel, cable and debris. They were at the bow, not the stern. Marcus pointed, indicating to follow the hull down the other side. Alicia shook her head decisively, pointing to her SPG, which read 1,000 psi. Ascending, they followed the hull at deck level, located the anchor line, followed it to their safety stop and surfaced.

WHAT THEY DID WRONG

They exceeded the 130-foot limit for recreational diving. Apparently affected by narcosis, Marcus confused his directions. Alicia suspected his error but followed him anyway. She didn't signal to ascend when it seemed narcosis might be affecting him. While searching for the propellers, they didn't follow the hull at deck level, which would have reduced the effects of narcosis and saved air.

WHAT THEY DID RIGHT

Despite narcosis and going the wrong way, they avoided a serious emergency. They carefully ascended above 130 feet and found the anchor line, even after going the wrong way, and managed their air supplies properly.

FIVE TIPS FROM THIS INCIDENT

1. **IF YOU THINK** your buddy is making a mistake, don't follow blindly. Communicate and clear things up before continuing.
2. **NARCOSIS ISN'T USUALLY OVERLY DRAMATIC.** It more commonly causes simple errors; the risk is that these errors can compound into more-serious situations.
3. **STAY AS SHALLOW AS YOU CAN** on a deep dive. It helps keep you clear-headed and increases your bottom time.
4. **IF YOU OR YOUR BUDDY** seems affected by narcosis, ascend shallower or end the dive.
5. **NEVER RISK RUNNING OUT OF AIR.** Manage it so you ascend with a reserve and enough to make a safety stop, especially on a deep dive.

ILLUSTRATION: THOMAS BURNS

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